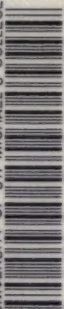


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HOW TO READ ENGLISH  
LITERATURE

II. DRYDEN TO MEREDITH

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# How to Read English Literature

Dryden to Meredith

BY

LAURIE MAGNUS, M.A.

*Author of "Introduction to Poetry," etc*



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## NOTE

THE object of these volumes is explained in the Preface to Part I ('Chaucer to Milton'), and in the Preface to the complete volume (two parts in one). I should like to take this opportunity of thanking many correspondents for their kind help and encouragement.

L. M.

LONDON,

*Midsummer-Day, 1907.*

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## II. DRYDEN TO MEREDITH

### CHAPTER IX

#### THE NEW AGE

Ah, dismal soul'd !  
The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd  
Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue  
Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew  
Of summer nights collected still to make  
The morning precious : beauty was awake !  
Why were ye not awake ? . . . .

. . . . Ill-fated, impious race !  
That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,  
And did not know it,—no, they went about,  
Holding a poor, decrepid standard out  
Marked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large  
The name of one Boileau !

KEATS

THE seventeenth century is divided by a broad line of demarcation into two distinct periods. Roughly, but not exactly—for dates and facts do not always correspond—the division may be placed at the year of the Restoration, 1660. Certainly, we may state that, though Dryden and Milton were contemporaries, in the sense that Dryden was forty-three years old when Milton died at sixty-four, yet, in every other sense, they belonged to different generations. The Restoration had flowed between them, with all that it brought and took away.

The following list of great men, before and after

the broad line, illustrates the nature of the change which occurred in the direction of English genius, and in its outlook on life. Remembering that 1660 is only approximately correct, and is selected for historical convenience; that Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, was published in 1667, and Wallis's *Arithmetica Infinitorum* in 1655, though Milton, by his character and performance, belongs to the further side of the line and Wallis to the hither, this table will be useful in fixing the points of the compass in the first and second halves of what is roughly the seventeenth century.

FLORUERUNT *before*, say, 1660

*Richard Hooker.* 1554-1600.

*Francis Bacon.* 1561-1626.

*William Shakespeare.* 1564-1616. And his immediate predecessors and successors in the roll of Elizabethan pure literature.

*William Harvey.* 1578-1657. Discoverer of the circulation of the blood.

*Thomas Hobbes.* 1588-1679. Author of *Leviathan*. Political philosopher. Harvey and Hobbes form a bridge between the Baconian era and the post-Restoration writers. So, too, in his own sphere, does

*Edmund Waller.* 1606-1687. Poet, of whom more hereafter.

*John Milton.* 1608-1674.

*John Bunyan.* 1628-1688.

FLORUERUNT *after*, say, 1660

*John Wallis.* 1617-1703. Author of *Arithmetica Infinitorum*, containing germs of the differential calculus.

*Seth Ward.* 1617-1689. Astronomer.

*Sir William Petty.* 1623-1687. Political economist.

*Robert Boyle.* 1627-1691. Chemist and natural philosopher.

*John Ray.* 1627-1705. Botanist.

*Sir Josiah Child.* 1630-1699. Political economist.

*John Dryden.* 1631-1700.

*John Locke.* 1632-1704. Founder of the analytic philosophy of the mind.

*Sir Christopher Wren.* 1632-1723. Architect.

*Robert Hooke.* 1635-1703. Experimental philosopher, and precursor of

*Sir Isaac Newton.* 1642-1727. Discoverer of gravitation, the calculus, etc.

*John Flamsteed.* 1646-1719. First Astronomer Royal.

*Edmund Halley.* 1656-1742. Astronomer. Life-statistician. Physical geographer.

*Sir Hans Sloane.* 1660-1753. Botanist.

*John Woodward.* 1665-1728. Geologist. The last three names are, of course, on the extreme verge of their generation, in which Newton is the culminating force.

If a generalization may be permitted at this point—a conclusion summarizing these *data*—it might be stated as the substitution of ‘why?’ for ‘what?’ in the attitude of art to nature. As was shown in an earlier chapter of this handbook, the English genius in the fourteenth century was content to express itself within definite limitations. The journey of Chaucer’s pilgrims from London to Canterbury was the measure, in a sense, of the ascertained knowledge of his day. Within that circumscribed area, the poet’s expression was complete. His style had the freshness of an Attic morning. His material was in harmony with his mood, and acquired artistic shape accordingly. Again, when the Englishman of the Tudors awoke from the wearisome quarrels of rival dynasties and kings to the spectacle of a new world, revealed to his wondering sight by Gutenberg, Vasco da Gama, Savonarola, Copernicus, Luther, Raphael, and the rest, who had led Europe out of the dark ages, he asked his insistent ‘what?’ at the frontiers of the known world and found a language adequate to his curiosity. He added Drake to adventure, Shakespeare to drama, Hooker to enlightenment,



Bacon to philosophy. An intense interest in knowledge and conduct, a practical object in the interpretative arts, a curiosity regulated by common sense but unlimited in daring—these were the notes of Tudor England, till her spirit outgrew its frame, and an independent people refused to confide to the hands of the Stuarts the forms and rules of government which Queen Elizabeth had held so securely. This, too, was Milton's generation, and such his distinguishing point of view. If Shakespeare, in his plays, answered the 'what?' of conduct, from the level of Caliban and the clowns to that of Hamlet and Cleopatra, Milton's sublimer rendering of nature's reply to the same question ranged through heaven and hell as well as through the known earth: he only chose, in the epic style, to concentrate his powers on a single, universalized problem, in his similar investigation of what humanity can *do*. Personality impinged on circumstances, personality in its environment—this is the common note of English literature from Chaucer to Milton inclusively. Its historical progress is marked by the ever-extended range of circumstances.

Now, step across the boundary-line, set—approximately—by the year 1660. After the 'what is there?' came the 'why is it?' The Royal Society, which had existed in an informal shape at the University of Oxford throughout the period of disturbed politics, was incorporated at this time, and its philosophical transactions date from 1665. John Evelyn (1620–1706) and Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), to whom—and to Pepys especially—we owe so much of our intimate acquaintance with the things

and people of the era, are busily writing their diaries. Instead of Drake and his fellow-mariners pushing back the barriers of commerce, we have Sir William Petty, Edmund Halley and Sir Josiah Child inquiring into the sources of wealth and the relations of land, wages, and labour, and laying the foundations of the sciences of political arithmetic and physical geography. Instead of sailors under the stars, we have the founders of astronomy—Seth Ward, John Flamsteed, and Robert Hooke. Instead of bringers of strange argosies and reporters of new lands beneath the sun, we have Robert Boyle, John Ray, John Woodward, and Sir Hans Sloane, chemists, botanists, physicists, geologists. Instead of dramatic problems of the conflict between the individual and his environment, we have Thomas Hobbes and political philosophy, John Locke and the philosophy of the mind. A hundred years after Shakespeare we have his compeer in science, Isaac Newton.

Thus, since Milton came before and Dryden after 1660—chosen as the dividing-line of the first and second periods of the century—we shall not be surprised to find the gulf of an era between them. It was the era in which England changed her attitude from that of an inquiring child to that of a reasoning man. The triumphs won in action, and its imitation or representation, were transferred to other modes of truth. Not things, but the forces behind them; not conduct, but its motives, became the objects of research; and methods of induction and demonstration were gradually cultivated and perfected.

Pure literature suffered in consequence. The

notes of personal experience and personal conviction tended quickly to disappear. Sincerity and individuality were sacrificed to accepted standards and convention. A writer would fix his eyes on his audience, instead of on his object. The literature which is 'overheard'\* was not written. The streams of lyric verse ran dry. Names, too, would be replaced by phrases—the names of things by phrases about things,—since the feelings which had brought words into use were reflected through thoughts about feelings. In a previous chapter we noted as a 'living voice of the times when the galleons of Elizabeth's sea-captains wrought England's business in the deep' the fine passage from Shakespeare :

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
 Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains  
 In cradle of the rude imperious surge . . .  
 Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose  
 To the wet sea boy in an hour so rude ;  
 And in the calmest and most stillest night,  
 With all appliances, and means to boot,  
 Deny it to a king ?

2 *King Henry IV*, III, i. 18-30.

Contrast now with these lines the following extract from Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, containing in the fourth line a reflection hardly less famous than Shakespeare's image of the wet sea-boy, in their several kinds ; and something of the difference between the two methods will impress itself by its own force :

\* "Eloquence is heard, poetry is *overheard*." J. S. Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions*, I, p. 57. (Routledge.)



Pleased with the danger when the waves went high,  
He sought the storms ; but, for a calm unfit,  
Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.  
Great wits are sure to madness near allied,  
And their partitions do their bounds divide ;  
Else why should he, with wealth and honour blest,  
Refuse his age the needful hours of rest ?  
Punish a body which he could not please ;  
Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease ?

These passages convey the contrast between the ' what ? ' and the ' why ? ' attitudes towards life. Shakespeare's lines express the very salt and savour of the sea : they are the manifest product of an epoch of action. Dryden's are as obviously written in an age of sedentary criticism : he analyses emotions which he does not communicate.

This contrast might be pursued through manifold signs. So far we are discussing merely the contrast of literary style, which is the reflection in literature of the spirit of an age. A predisposition to a certain style, derived from the multiple forces of thought, habit and occupation by which that spirit is formed, dictates almost involuntarily the choice of a writer's subject. As far as he is within the control of the spirit of his own times, and as far as it affects his style, the author is little more than an unconscious agent in the selection of his material. He works, if an analogy may be permitted, like an architect in construction. Certain definite and partly definite conditions—the neighbouring buildings, the landscape of the neighbourhood, the ' spirit ' of the job—predispose the architect to a certain style, and his choice of material is governed by its natural laws, any marked defiance of which would pro-

duce a grotesque effect. Dryden, in the Caroline age, employing Elizabethan material, would have been similarly grotesque : and an author's avoidance of that offence against the natural laws of construction is instinctive rather than deliberate. Thus, if we succeed in seizing the essential spirit of the new age, and of the style to which it predisposed writers, we shall be prepared for the consequent changes in material or subject to which the literature was so readily adapted.

In this connection of style only, the following verses may be examined from Dryden's panegyric on the coronation of his 'Sacred Majesty Charles the Second' :

As heaven, of old, dispensed celestial dew,  
 You gave us manna, and still give us new.  
 Now our sad ruins are removed from sight,  
 The season too comes fraught with new delight :  
 Time seems not now beneath his years to stoop,  
 Nor do his wings with sickly feathers droop :  
 Soft western winds waft o'er the gaudy spring,  
 And open'd scenes of flowers and blossoms bring . . .  
 Born to command the mistress of the seas,  
 Your thoughts themselves in that blue empire please.  
 Hither in summer evenings you repair  
 To taste the fraicheur of a purer air . . .  
 What to your cares we owe, is learnt from hence  
 When e'en your pleasures serve for our defence.  
 Beyond your court flows in th' admitted tide.  
 Where in new depths the wandering fishes glide :  
 Here in a royal bed the waters sleep ;  
 When, tired at sea, within this bay they creep,  
 Here the mistrustful fowl no harm suspects,  
 So safe are all things which our King protects.

It is pertinent to the discussion of the style to note, first, its technical excellence as heroic verse, or verse in rhymed couplets of ten syllables,—a

regular measure, inviting, in some degree, the quality of incisiveness and a partition of the sense in compartments; and, secondly, the ingenuity with which the panegyric is composed. The praise of the king, for example, in the last lines of our extract, for having occupied his leisure with superintending a new basin in the Thames, is admirably pointed and expressed; but what particularly concerns us here is the contrast of the style, as use of words, with that which obtained in the period prior to 1660, at which we drew our approximate broad line. An Elizabethan would have been at once more daring and more direct. He might even have been more extravagant. He would have visualized his concepts more boldly—by which is meant simply that his thoughts, rendered into language, would be sharper and clearer in their outlines,—and his images, when once they had been selected with a definite knowledge of their values, would have been brought into closer relationship with the subject of the verse. The whole effect would have been brighter and more concrete; the margins of the language would have been reduced, in order to fit it more securely into the clamps of its framework. Taking the first six lines in detail, we may note the following characteristics in illustration of these remarks: first, the similes, similar in a single aspect—‘as heaven drops dew, [so] you give us manna’; ‘as our sad experiences are repaired, time seems not to droop and spring returns’. If we compare this simile of the dew with Shakespeare’s lines in *The Merchant of Venice*, (IV, i, 184)—

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
 Upon the place beneath ; it is twice blest ;  
 It blesseth him that gives and him that takes,

we shall appreciate a difference in sincerity and grasp. Shakespeare was possessed by the similarity ; Dryden took it up and let it go ; Shakespeare held it himself, till it acquired the distinction of his individuality ; Dryden glanced at it for a moment, employing it for reference only, as a man may refer to a book stocked in a public library. There is an essential difference in style between images invented for the occasion and images borrowed from stock. Secondly, the verbs and epithets—the words of action and delineation—lack the Elizabethan colouring and its personal note of conviction. 'Celestial,' 'waft', 'gaudy' are instances in point, and 'open'd scenes of flowers and blossoms', though April (from *aperio*) be, literally, the month of opening, has no outline or precision, and conveys no sense of proprietorship. Things, as was said above, are replaced by phrases about things ; feeling is reflected through the medium of general conduct ; the power of calling things by names fails with the creative imagination. And, thirdly, we may note 'fraicheur', which will call for subsequent remark. In this short extract, accordingly, from a representative of the literary movement which critics term 'classical'\* in distinction from 'naturalistic' or 'romantic', we have discovered ample justification for the summary conclusion which we drew from

\* Because its practitioners emulated the polish and elegance of Horace and Ovid, the Latin classics.



the names of the great men before and after, say, 1660. As Mr Edmund Gosse wrote more than twenty years ago, in his Clark lectures 'on the causes and phenomena of the rise of classical poetry in England':

The seer disappeared, and the artificer took his place. For a whole century the singer that only sang because he must, and as the linnets do, was entirely absent from English literature. He came back at the close of the eighteenth century, with Burns in Scotland and with Blake in England. The lyrical gift, which had overpowered every other . . . gradually expired, . . . disappearing before the century was out \*.

This detailed criticism has been offered, partly to justify the conclusion stated at the beginning of the chapter, partly to familiarize readers, by means of a concrete example, with the change in the spirit of the times as it affected learning and style. We may now briefly consider some of the causes in public life which contributed to the production of the new spirit. Such acquaintance both with causes and effects will help us to read English literature between the Restoration of the Stuarts in 1660 and the period of the French Revolution (1789) more intelligently and with greater pleasure, and will give us the requisite clues in finding our way through its products.

In a brilliant chapter of history—the third in Macaulay's *England*—we are given a rapid sketch of 'the state of England in 1685'. The account makes excellent reading, and should be consulted at first hand. We are told of the difficulties of

\* *From Shakespeare to Pope*, p. 258. (Cambridge University Press.)

travel, and of the—comparative—goodness of the inns in consequence. We are told of the enterprise of the Post Office, and its private rivals, and of the beginnings of 'newsletters', as forerunners of the newspaper-press. We are told of the coffee-houses in London, where men foregathered for discussion, much in the same way that they gather in clubs to-day, but with the difference that the coffee-house was a centre of information as well as of discussion. We are told, too, of the reaction from Puritan austerities—how the standard of woman's education and of woman's refinement was degraded; how 'the war between wit and Puritanism soon became a war between wit and morality'; how the relaxation of restraints affected the stage and letters; how higher literature was rewarded far less generously than debased drama, and lost its independence in consequence; how the era of patronage came in, and how French models of style affected English composition. It was an age, we must remember, of sudden release from long anxiety and of comparative freedom from grave care. The centre of responsibility had been shifted, with a very real sense of relief, from the middle-classes back to the Court. The military rule of the Dictatorship had been removed, and self-indulgence and pleasure-seeking poured out with accumulated force. Moreover, the needs of the hour turned men's attention homewards. They had their houses to set in order, the ruins of the Civil War to repair, their destroyed dwellings to rebuild, and to renew their confiscated treasures. It has been well said that, apart from science, the course of English thought

in this age was 'notably insular', and Pepys's Diary gives a picture of the age which enables us to reconstruct its features, and to realize the absorbing interest of domestic politics and home affairs. Energy expressed itself in criticism, and discontent in satire, as necessarily happens when circumstances fail to provide a free field for the spirit of adventure. Taking these two forces in combination—the reaction from the Puritan régime and the inward attraction of talent—and recalling the general characteristics of the times, we are prepared for the diversion of literature into critical channels, flowing between cultivated banks, and ever forgetting more and more the passion and the torrents of past days. We accept as inevitable in the circumstances the licentiousness and immorality of the stage, since its years of leanness were ended; we infer the destitution of pure letters, their dependence on the patronage of rich men; we note the rise of the coffee-houses, each with its *arbiter elegantiarum*, its president of polite taste, as centres of opinion and influence; and we are not unprepared for the coalescence of opinions so formed in critical reviews of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* type, for these are themselves a sign—and a sign of considerable importance—of the growth of professional literature, with schools and classes of its own, in succession to the epoch of individual expression.

We are anticipating a little here. The first number of *The Tatler* appeared in April, 1709, and the first number of *The Spectator* in March, 1711. But, obviously, they arrived at a time and among a people suited and ready for their appearance,

and it is appropriate to their context to note that *The Tatler's* motto was 'celebrare domestica facta'\*, and that the editor stated in the first number: 'All accounts of gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment shall be under the article of White's Coffee-House; Poetry, under that of Will's Coffee-House; Learning, under the title of Grecian; Foreign and Domestic News you will have from Saint James's Coffee-House; and what else I have to offer on any other subject shall be dated from my own Apartment'.

One factor has been omitted—the influence of the example of the French. 'We do naturally all love the Spanish, and hate the French', declared Pepys in his *Diary*, September 30th, 1661, and we have to reconcile with this sentiment the appearance of the word 'fraicheur' in the extract cited above from Dryden's panegyric on the coronation of Charles II. Here we must go back a little way. The damning evidence of 'fraicheur' must not lead us to infer a direct invasion of French taste; indeed, the testimony of Pepys to the general feeling of the country forbids so hasty a conclusion. Consideration is more likely to lead to a conception of a movement arising out of common conditions, starting independently in both countries, moving on parallel lines, and meeting only across a bridge formed at a period when the Civil War in England drove some Royalist partizans to seek refuge with the Queen in France. The common conditions existed

\* This motto was first adopted in No. 41. There were three numbers a week. The paper was discontinued after twenty months.



in the reaction of taste among the forward nations of Europe against the extravagance and the exaggeration which marked the close of the Renaissance. We need not rehearse the story of the revival of learning. We know how refreshing was its touch on the eyelids of Europe, and how vivid was her awakening from the slumber of the 'dark ages'. We know, too, that its forces waned, and that, as it sank, its evil side turned uppermost. The name of Giovanni Battista Marini, who died in 1625, is one which frequently occurs, in its derivative 'the Marinists', in accounts of the transition from romantic to classical taste. Marini, as Hallam writes in his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, 'belongs to that very numerous body of poets who, delighted with the spontaneity of their ideas, never reject any that arise; their parental love forbids all preference, and an impartial law of gavel-kind shares their page among all the offspring of their brain' \*; and Hallam quotes from Crescimbeni, an eminent Italian critic, the following description: 'To Marini we owe the lawlessness of composition: the ebullition of his genius, incapable of restraint, burst through every bulwark, enduring no rule but that of his own humour, which was all for sonorous verse, bold and ingenious thoughts, fantastical subjects, a phraseology rather Latin than Italian, and in short aimed at pleasing by a false appearance of beauty' †.

The classical tendency in art and letters was directed against this 'lawlessness', against this

\* Vol. III, p. 7. (Murray, 1873.)

† Ibid.

absence of rule and incapacity of restraint, in favour of the canons of propriety and precepts for composition as laid down, for example, in the *Ars Poetica* of Horace. We had our Marinists in England in the 'metaphysical' poets discussed in chapter viii of this work; and the revolt against their excesses and conceits—their parental fondness for their own ideas, the geese and the swans indiscriminately—was not imported into England from abroad, but arose of its own accord from like conditions. Dryden's succession to the school of Herrick, Herbert, Donne, Crashaw and Quarles, despite the evidence of 'fraicheur', was not France invading England; it was the common rejection of licensed intemperance in verse, and the expression of a common reaction, when the spirit of adventure had ceased, against the symbols of the Renaissance. A new note in literature was wanted to satisfy the new note in life. Luxuriance, exuberance, intoxication yielded to restraint, rule, sobriety.

That French example helped English practice is, however, not to be gainsaid. A mere recital of the names of the great French writers of the epoch is instructive at this point. Malherbe (1555-1628), Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), Molière (1622-1673), Boileau (1636-1711) \*, are poets and critics whose reputation is hardly less to-day than it was two-and-a-half centuries ago when they inaugurated their reforms in favour of the classical tradition. The foundation in 1634 of the

\* See the lines prefixed to this chapter, in which Keats (1795-1821) expresses the reaction from the standards of the 'classical' school.

Académie Française—the authority of formal taste in letters, and the only successful academy of its kind, despite the dreams of Dryden and the later hopes of Matthew Arnold—bore witness to the zeal of the reformers; and the emergence of France above Italy at this period in politics—it has been remarked that Milton appealed to Italian and Dryden to French critics,—taken in connection with the personality of Louis XIV, King of France (1638–1715), surnamed ‘le grand Monarque’, established the claim of the French to be arbiters of taste. The talk of a ‘Gallo-classic’ period in English literature and criticism is merely a convenient evasion of the trouble of examining the facts. Catch-words are seldom convincing, and never represent the whole truth. The classical tendency existed in England as early as Ben Jonson, and was due to far larger causes than the mere influence of France. But it is true that the French successes acted as a stimulus and an encouragement to the leaders of the reaction at home, and a point of contact was established when, in 1644, Queen Henrietta Maria, the consort of Charles I, escaped to Paris from her troubles, and was attended there from time to time by other victims of ‘the exile’, including Sir John Denham and Edmund Waller, both poets of the new school. Perhaps, enough has been said to explain the occurrence of ‘fraicheur’ in the extract from Dryden, but too little will have been said if we fail to record that many French words, more desirable than ‘fraicheur’—‘adroit’ and ‘chagrin’ are among them—found their way into English at this time.

It may be asked at this point, in what technical principles, apart from general differences of style, the literature of the classical revival differed from the contemporary work of the last of the 'romanticists', including Milton himself. The reply has been anticipated to some extent in the foregoing paragraphs, and we shall return to it again, alike in our account of the writers who represent the new tendency, and, later, again, of those who reacted from it. Here we may piece together a few items of evidence, which, by their cumulative effect, support the foregoing arguments. We remarked the disappearance of the note of personal conviction and directness, and it emphasizes this remark to add that, since Milton's death, the sonnet, as a form of verse, was almost unknown in England till the middle of the eighteenth century. And the sonnet is, pre-eminently, the most sensitive medium for a poet's expression of feeling. We said that Marini, the Italian, like Guevara, the Spaniard, before him, whose *Golden Book*, reproduced by North's *Dial of Princes*, exercised through John Lyly and the Euphuists so much effect on English prose \*, was a 'decadent' of the Renaissance, if the paradox be permissible, and, as the chief of

\* Lyly's *Euphues* appeared in 1579. Its obligation to the *Golden Book* of Antonio de Guevara (1495-1545) is a question which scholars are deciding in a diminishing scale of affirmation. See *Documents Illustrating Elizabethan Poetry*, pp. 21 and 101 (Routledge). The Euphuists introduced sentence-building and paragraph-construction into the interminable periods of earlier composition, and English prose owes them a considerable debt in this respect. Its affectations and conceits, however, shown in its far-sought diction, its elaborate alliterative effects, and its meaningless illustrations from natural



his school, helped to bring into contempt the style of preciosity and 'conceits' which infected lyric and dramatic verse in England in the first half of the seventeenth century. This remark derives force from the title and scope of one of Molière's comedies, *Les Précieuses Ridicules* (first enacted November, 1659), which laughed the affectation out of fashion. We noted that the change in literature was intimately associated with the tendency to methodize thought in all departments of knowledge, and to dispose the treasures of the discoverers under systematic rules. We add now that the French philosopher, René Descartes (1596-1650), the author in 1637 of *Discours de la Méthode* is the acknowledged source, though not the direct head, of that branch of philosophic reasoning which is now called Aesthetics. 'No one', as Professor Saintsbury writes \*, 'who has the least acquaintance with the Cartesian philosophy, can fail to see how naturally—nay, how inevitably— . . . [it] should lead to a reconsideration and further exploration of the idea of Beauty, literary and other'. To this, too, we shall recur in a later chapter. Finally, we may refer to the evidence of contemporaries. When we find that a certain John Norris (1657-1711) expressed in one of his few works an intention 'to restore the declining genius of poetry to its primitive and genuine greatness, to wind up the strings of the

history, produced a reaction in favour of a more straightforward style. See, generally, *John Lyly*, edited by Prof. Bond, I, 119 ff. (Clarendon Press), and see page 86 above.

\* *History of Criticism*, III, 146 (Blackwood).

Muses' lyre', we may fairly safely infer that, in his opinion at least, a lyric restoration was as desirable as the restoration of the Stuarts, and that he was as keenly in favour of a return to his fathers' gods. So, too, a poetaster, Philip Ayres (1638-1712), apologized in the preface to his book for reverting to the manner of 'the famous Mr Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, and Mr Milton'.

And so we come back to our question as to the principles of the change. What was it that it aimed at, and to what standards did it seek to conform? François de Fénelon (1651-1715), perhaps expressed himself most clearly in his account of the transactions of the French Academy, in which he urged the need of codifying the rules of the arts of rhetoric and poetics. He demanded, for a literary work, above all, the supreme qualities of singleness and composition: 'whoso does not feel the beauty and force of this unity, of this order, has not yet seen broad daylight, but only the shadows in the cavern of Plato'\*. Unity, then, and order, in reaction from diffuse and free self-expression, are the marks of the new purpose which invaded English literature. We may recall in this connection one fact and one conclusion. The fact is that the Royal Society included in its list of members, not merely men of science but men of letters too. Pepys was a president, Dryden a member, and its aim was to recognize and reward every kind of intellectual distinction. There were moments when the literary members hoped to

\* This quotation from Fénelon, together with the few preceding words, is taken from Elton, *The Augustan Age*, p. 153 (Blackwood).

repeat in England the example of the Académie Française, and this leads to our conclusion that the literary ideal had a scientific pattern. Bishop Sprat (1635-1713), one of the founders and the earliest historian of the Royal Society, whose sermons were distinguished by the excellence of their prose, has set on record what the fellowship of the Society entailed: 'a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can'. Above all, appeal was made to the precepts of Aristotle, and the warnings of Horace. From Aristotle's laws of drama were derived the famous 'Unities' of place, action, and time; from Horace came the bland ridicule of the cypress-painter commissioned for a shipwreck, and of the female figure ending in a fish—

spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici ?

Similar absurdities were occurring in the literature of the day, and, now that the spirit of the times was killing romance and adventure, the pioneers of authority and law would see to it that they should not recur.

To sum up the impressions recorded in this chapter :

i. The year 1660 supplies a convenient date by which to distinguish the pre-Restoration from the post-Restoration writers.

ii. The writers in either period are distinguished by their style, which affected their subject.

iii. The transition from one style to another was the natural expression in literature of various

tendencies which were 'in the air' at that time. Among such tendencies may be mentioned :

1. The intellectual diversion from channels of adventure to channels of research, exemplified by the incorporation of the Royal Society, which included literary members ; by the systematization of the sciences, leading to the masterwork of Newton, and by the requirements of social life, due to the havoc wrought by the incendiaries and iconoclasts of the Commonwealth, and by fire and plague in London.
2. The growth of literary clubs, and, consequently, of common standards of taste.
3. The force of the reaction from the far-sought elegances of the 'precious' writers, who represent the decadence of the flowering-time of the Renaissance.
4. The return to rule and restraint in literary composition, associated directly with the leaders of criticism in France, and, through them, as well as directly, with the critics of antiquity, such as Aristotle and Horace.
- iv. The old and new styles are fairly accurately described as 'natural' (or 'romantic') and 'classical'.
- v. The 'romantic' tradition appealed to Italy, the 'classical' to France. *was more*
- vi. A ~~marked~~ feature of the change is the disappearance of individuality, and the displacement of personal conviction by general consent.
- vii. A marked result of the change is the use of sober prose, suited to the standard of the Royal Society, and the growing use of a form of verse



with regular modulations, admitting the minimum of variation due to individual emotion or caprice, and the maximum of external glitter of a kind which would please the average taste of a cultivated audience. The suitable metre was found in Chaucer's rhymed couplets of decasyllabic lines, pointed and painted to suit the new standard, and known as heroic verse.

viii. The re-opening of the theatres, and, generally, the relief from the exaggerated virtues of the Puritans, produced a temporary vogue of immoral and indecent plays. Writing for the stage became so popular and remunerative that some authors of repute in other fields wrote plays as 'pot-boilers', and that, further, authors of books came to depend too obsequiously on patronage.

More briefly, we may say that extraneous order was imposed on the unrestrained licence of self-expression, and that polish was substituted for colour as a literary ideal; and, further, that these tendencies were partly the effect of deliberate invention and imitation, and were partly assumed in unconscious conformity to the spirit of the new age.

How far, and with what exceptions and harkings-back, the actual literature of the age corresponded to the expectations we have formed of it, is now to be considered.

To what extent  
they were in influence  
is now

## CHAPTER X

### AIMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

' Out of the English political spirit was developed in English poetry the classical form'.

W. J. COURTHOPE

IN reading the literature of the new age, one or two dates and facts, irrespective of dynasties and kings, should be remembered and considered :

<i>Date.</i>	<i>Fact.</i>	<i>Remarks.</i>
1689	<i>Mutiny Act . . .</i>	The effect of this measure was to give, for the first time in its history, a definite position to the Army, and to organize it as an independent arm.
—	<i>Bill of Rights . .</i>	Placed taxation and a standing army within the discretion of Parliament, and secured the principles of free speech and free elections.
1689 '0 1697 and 1702 to 1713	<i>Wars in Europe : the second period being known as The War of the Spanish Succession</i>	' The expansion of England in the New World and in Asia is the formula which sums up for England the history of the eighteenth century. The explanation of that second Hundred Years' War between England and France, which fills the eighteenth century, is this, that they were rival candidates for the possession of the New World'.* The cause explained in this brilliant generalization did not always illuminate the motives of the belligerents, which were complicated by questions of dynastic and religious differences. But, Jacobite plots and their fascination notwithstanding, the true meaning of this warfare—from 1689 right away to Waterloo—must be sought in commercial history, and its true course was a duel for colonial supremacy. England required the mastery of the seas from Spain, Holland and France.

\* Seeley, *Expansion of England* (Macmillan). Page 28.

Date.	Fact.	Remarks.
1694	<i>Foundation of the Bank of England</i>	A notable sign of what may be called the financial self-consciousness of the nation. To be connected with the beginning of the <i>National Debt</i> , a financial expedient which mounted to more than £54,000,000 during the twenty years of warfare and commerce before 1714.
—	<i>Greenwich Hospital</i>	Converted to a naval hospital from an unfinished palace of Charles II. To be connected with the Acts of Parliament of 1696, 1700 and 1706, as to manning, rations discipline, and so forth, which together mark a marvellous advance in the administration of the Navy since the times of the Armada. Sir Cloudesley Shovell, Admiral of the Fleet (1650 to 1707), was famous as a naval reformer. Evelyn, the Diarist, was the first treasurer of the Hospital.
—	<i>Triennial Parliaments Act</i>	A measure of constitutional security, heralding the democratic measures of succeeding generations.
—	<i>Freedom of the Press</i>	Secured by the lapse of a former Act.
1698	<i>Eddystone Lighthouse</i>	Selected as typical of the reforms in coast-protection and defence.
1702	<i>Amalgamation of the East India Companies</i>	An event of commercial importance.
1707	<i>Act of Union</i>	Between England and Scotland. The shamrock was still to be added to the new 'Union Jack', but at least the foundation was laid of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.
1711	<i>South Sea Company</i>	Founded to trade with South America—typical of the public activity and interest in transmarine financial enterprises.

If a common factor be sought in these diverse symbols of progress—constitutional government, Admiralty and Army reform, public credit, enterprise, and so forth—we should call it method, or order. The nation, as the heir of great possessions, was determined to employ—in a sense, to understand—its inheritance. Utility was the common watchword. Constructive criticism was at work. A free people had developed a sense of political existence. 'The Age of Anne', as it is called, is merely the name of a name; but the description

of this period in literature as 'The Augustan Age' is at once usual and correct and carries with it a comparison. Like signs of social maturing, a like passion for law and order, a like concentration and restraint characterized the Augustan age in Rome, of which duty, or 'piety', was the virtue, and Virgil was the prophet. Duty—the 'piety' of Æneas, the hero of the epic of Rome—was a public or social virtue repressing individual expression, and a likeness to the same ideal, transferred from conduct to letters, is discoverable in Pope's famous lines :

True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,  
What oft was felt, but ne'er so well expressed.

Thus, if we look away from the obvious persons and things, if we forget the James and the Charles, the Orange and the Brunswick, the Restoration, the Revolution, and the rest, we obtain a view of the period peculiarly useful to our purpose. James II, abdicating the throne in 1688; the accession of Mary, his daughter, and of William, her consort and cousin, in the following year; his death in 1702, and the succession of Anne, younger sister to Mary; the death of Queen Anne in 1714, and the passing of the Crown to George I, great-grandson in the female line of James I—these are the external features of the tendencies displayed above. The inner meaning of the record must be sought below the surface. The growth of national control in times of unremitting warfare; the organized services replacing the fighting forces of the Tudors; the union of England and Scotland; the advances towards civic liberty; the exploitation of Empire in the interests of trade,



and the development of State finance—all these contributed their part to that 'English political spirit', out of which, as Professor Courthope reminds us in the extract prefixed to this chapter, 'was developed in English poetry the classical form'. Without this evidence it is hard to perceive a connection between the two—between the spirit and the voice—and to realize its inevitableness. The actual participants in the events were never necessarily aware of the larger design which they were serving. Men, after all, are partly unconscious agents of fate, and a hundred local interests, arising from Jacobitism and the like, may have concealed or distracted the guiding principle. But the degree of light or darkness in which men work to a common end is less important in this regard than the light by which they see. The growth and changes of this period modified the forces of English character, and the new modes found expression, politically, in the accession of the House of Orange and Brunswick, and, in literature, in the writings of Dryden, Addison and Pope.

The change was not effected all at once. It is traced in a little group of writers who flourished before the Restoration, and fluttered round the hero of that event, but were never in the front rank of action. This group coincided in time with the last representatives of the Renaissance, between whom and the 'new' men there is, accordingly, a kind of fluctuation. It is seen more prominently in the writers, who, though their youth was passed in the epoch of Civil War, spent their manhood in more settled conditions. Of these Dryden is the chief. And it came to completest expression

in the reign of Queen Anne, when the 'bloodless' Revolution had put an end to dynastic disturbances. The following list of births during the seventeenth century will indicate the stages of the change. The names of the more important authors are printed in bolder type.

First come the major and minor representatives of the 'old' school, the later Elizabethan writers, who may be taken to have flourished prior to 1660. With them, in the order of their birth-years, are the names of the early writers in the 'new' school. Some of these names we met in the last volume; others we shall meet again; here, for the present, a few remarks will be sufficient:

Born.	Name.	Remarks.
In the last decade of the Sixteenth Century	George Herbert Francis Quarles Robert Herrick Thomas Carew	Devotional and lyrical poets in the style, more or less pronounced, of 'metaphysical' conceits. See last volume, <i>Chaucer to Milton</i> , pp. 177, 181.
1605	Sir Thomas Browne William Habington	Author of <i>Religio Medici</i> ; ib. p. 182. Author of <i>Castara</i> .
1606	Sir William D'Avenant EDMUND WALLER .	Poet-Laureate, 1638. Playwright: <i>Gondibert</i> . The first considerable writer of 'appropriate' verse (see below). Simple lyricist. Second-rate politician.
1608	JOHN MILTON . .	<i>Paradise Lost</i> , etc.
	Thomas Fuller . .	See last volume, p. 148.
1609	Sir John Suckling .	Playwright and lyricist.
1612	Samuel Butler . .	Satirist: <i>Hudibras</i> .
1613	Richard Crashaw .	<i>Steps to the Temple</i> . See last vol., p. 181.
	Jeremy Taylor . .	Ib., pp. 149-53.
1615	Sir John Denham .	The first writer of 'descriptive' verse: <i>Cooper's Hill</i> .
1618	Abraham Cowley .	Dramatist and 'occasional' poet. Cowley, D'Avenant, Waller and Denham visited or resided in France in attendance on Queen Henrietta Maria.
	Robert Lovelace .	See last vol., p. 170.
1621	Andrew Marvell .	Poet and Satirist: <i>Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland</i> , ib., p. 182.
1622	Henry Vaughan .	Devotional and lyric verse.
1628	JOHN BUNYAN . .	<i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> .

Next, in a class by himself, comes (JOHN DRYDEN), born in 1631, whose genius looked both ways, and who may stand to represent the middle of the century and of the age. John Locke, the philosopher, was born in 1632, and belongs, like Newton (1642), to the history of thought rather than of letters. They are succeeded by a line of writers who flourished after 1660, and whose names, pending nearer acquaintance, may be grouped in parallel columns, as dramatic and non-dramatic authors :

Born.	Dramatists.	Born.	Other Writers.
1640	William Wycherley	1661	DANIEL DEFOE.
1651	Thomas Otway	1667	JONATHAN SWIFT.
1655	Nathaniel Lee	1672	JOSEPH ADDISON.
1666	Sir John Vanburgh	1672	Richard Steele.
1670	William Congreve	1688	John Gay.
1674	Nicholas Rowe	1688	ALEXANDER POPE.
1678	George Farquhar	1689	SAMUEL RICHARDSON.
		1700	JAMES THOMSON.

Thus, at a cursory view, there are three stages to be distinguished in the development of the change ; *First*, the period of transition, when the fires of the Renaissance were dying down, and the new lights were still burning dimly. *Secondly*, the period of Dryden and the drama—of Dryden anticipating the new age, and of the drama pulling him back into the vortex of reaction against Puritan ideals. And *thirdly*—nearly contemporary with the last, but a year or two later in date—the new age of Anne, the fine flower of Augustanism, represented by the writers in the second column above, and chiefly by Pope.

These stages, with all that they implied in public and private life, must be thoroughly apprehended,

if we are to understand and to read aright the literary products of the age. The 'English political spirit' grew up in these conditions, and out of it, as we have been told, 'was developed in English poetry the classical form'. If we repeat that the great Frenchmen of this epoch included Pierre Corneille (born 1606), Lafontaine (1621), Molière (1622), Bossuet (1627), Malebranche (1631), Boileau (1636), Racine (1639), Fénelon (1651), Montesquieu (1689), and Voltaire (1694), the preparation is complete. We shall be ready, when the time comes, to greet, with intelligent appreciation, the great men of the eighteenth century—in England, Fielding, Gray, Sterne, Cowper, Collins, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Blake, Burns; in France, Rousseau, Diderot, and their school; in Germany, Klopstock, Kant, Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Schiller. For the lines have been set in the period now under review for the whole future of English letters.

To go back to the beginning of the change. While John Milton—aloof, and apart from the crowd of lesser men—was meditating his epic, and while, not far from that height, despite his ignobler surroundings, John Bunyan was writing his allegory of sin, repentance, and salvation, the minor writers and politicians of the age—Herrick, Waller, Butler, Marvell—swaying this way and that in the noisier plains below, and lacking ability to see the whole through the broken colours of its parts, worked obscurely towards the light. It is neither necessary nor practicable to discuss in detail each name which occurs in the literary annals of that time. George Herbert and Henry Vaughan attained the highest distinction in devotional verse, to which



they were naturally withdrawn from the political preoccupation of the age. Robert Herrick, in his *Noble Numbers*, affected the same kind of composition, but achieved a greater success in his secular songs of love and country-life, collected under the title of *Hesperides*. With his lyrics may be mentioned those of Lovelace and Suckling, and all five writers are amply represented in various recent anthologies. Quarles, Crashaw and Carew take more definite rank in the so-called 'metaphysical' school, which sought its triumphs in strange ways of speech, caring most for variety of illustration and far-fetched fancies of phrase\*. Much beauty lurks in their writings, but it is the beauty of decay, and reflects the rich colours of the autumn of the Renaissance. Sir Thomas Browne was a physician and an antiquary, representing in his own person the contrary tendencies of his times. By affinity of taste, by his unspecialized learning, and by his undisciplined style, he belonged to the 'old' school, though his bold speculations and his anxiety for correct thought mark him as an elder contemporary of Locke. Thomas Fuller and Jeremy Taylor, theological writers both, are important in the history of the development of an orderly prose-

\* *The Cambridge Modern History* (Vol. IV, ch. xxv) calls it 'The Fantastic School,' and says: 'Their extravagances and incongruities, both of style and of thought, reflect the extravagances and incongruities of an age of transition and revolution, an age violent and uncompromising both in action and in ideas. But . . . the Fantastic Poets in their conflicts of thought produced beauties, "things extreme, and scattering bright", to quote the words of Donne, which cannot be paralleled in any other period of our literature.'

style, apart from the value respectively of Fuller's *Worthies of England* and Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, which are the best-known of their works. Andrew Marvell, who was admitted, more nearly than anyone else, to the honour of Milton's friendship, wrote poetry in his youth and pamphlets in middle-age, as well as Republican satires; he is chiefly remembered for his *Horatian Ode* in praise of the Protector. And Samuel Butler, to conclude this survey of the plains, had opportunities of observing, as clerk of the peace to several Puritan magistrates, much of the seamy side of professional rectitude. His famous *Hudibras* is a satire on the Parliamentary party, and contains many memorable reflections on the baser aspects of human nature\*.

\* The summary in the foregoing paragraph of the last writers in the 'old' school is necessarily very incomplete. Part of it has been amplified in the chapters on 'The Progress of Prose' and 'The Puritan Reaction' in my previous volume. Students who are more curious about these authors will find serviceable editions published at 1s. net a volume in *The Muses Library* (Routledge), as follows: Carew, edited by A. Vincent; Crashaw, by J. R. Tutin, with introduction by Canon Beeching; Donne, by E. K. Chambers, with Introduction by Prof. Saintsbury; Herrick, by A. Pollard, with Introduction by A. C. Swinburne (2 vols.); Marvell, by G. A. Aitken (2 vols.); Vaughan, by E. K. Chambers, with introduction by Canon Beeching (2 vols.); and Waller, by G. Thorn Drury (2 vols.). Sir Thomas Browne's works, edited by Professor Herford (1s. net.), are published by Messrs. Dent, whose *Temple Dramatists* (1s. net. each) contain representative plays of Otway and Farquhar. The student is not recommended to spend much time on the Restoration drama, the features characteristic of which exercised no permanent influence on the course of English literature. Messrs. Frowde announce for *The World's Clas-*

With these exceptions and fluctuations, and with this preparation for the new age in other departments than in literature, we are now free to examine the works of the Augustan masters.

Two more names only need detain us, those of Waller and Denham, each of whom added something to the rising structure of the age. Edmund Waller (1606 to 1687), whose long life of somewhat squalid political adventure was illumined by his poetic courtship—for it had no tangible reality—of Dorothy, Countess of Sunderland, celebrated as his 'Sacharissa', has been mentioned above as the first considerable writer of occasional or appropriate verse. Remembering Pope's definition of 'true wit' as 'Nature to advantage dressed, what oft was felt, but ne'er so well expressed', we are not unprepared for this departure from the exotic gardens of the neologizers—or ingenious inventors of conceits—to the trim and elegant borders of conventional flower-beds. Carew and Waller were contemporaries, but note for a moment the contrast in the mere titles of their poems. Instead of the 'Lips and Eyes', 'Murdering Beauty', 'Disdain Returned', 'To her again, she burning in a Fever', 'Celia Singing', 'The Damask Rose', 'The Toothache cured by a Kiss', etc., to which Carew tuned his lyre, we have 'To my Lady Morton, on New Year's Day', 'A Panegyric to my Lord Protector', 'Upon the

sics an edition of George Herbert (introduction by A. Waugh; 1s. net) and publish in two volumes, under the same editorship and in the same series, Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, which is full of interest for this period.

late Storm, and of the death of His Highness ensuing the same', 'To the Duchess of Orleans when she was taking leave of the Count at Dover', 'Upon the Earl of Roscommon's translation of Horace', and so forth. The change is wholesome and refreshing, for the resources of the lips-and-eyes style had been exhausted by the Elizabethans, and men turned in this matter-of-fact age with a keen sense of relief to a poet who related in simple language the sentiments which, in common with his fellows, he derived from obvious occurrences. And the innovation in subjects is matched by a corresponding simplicity in style. Carew wrote 'Upon a Ribbon':

This silken wreath, which circles in mine arm,  
Is but an emblem of that mystic charm  
Wherewith the magic of your beauties binds  
My captive soul, and round about it winds  
Fetters of lasting love. This hath entwined  
My flesh alone; that hath empaled my mind.  
Time may wear out these soft weak bands, but those  
Strong chains of brass Fate shall not discompose.

It is very pretty, very ingenious, with its mystic emblems and mechanical antitheses. But how differently Waller can write 'To the King':

Great Sir! disdain not in this piece to stand,  
Supreme commander both of sea and land.  
Those which inhabit the celestial bower,  
Painters express with emblems of their power;  
His club Alcides, Phoebus has his bow,  
Jove has his thunder, and your navy you.

It is almost banal in its conventionality, but at least it is plain and straightforward.

John Donne (1573-1631) was thirty years older



than Waller, but his seniority does not account for the century of progress which rolls between them. Donne's happiest verses are hardly quotable to-day: they possess too much of what Professor Saintsbury calls 'frank naturalism redeemed from coarseness by passion' \*. But a fair sample of his style may be taken from his poem on the 'Obsequies of the Lord Harrington':

So though thy circle to thyself express  
All, tending to thy endless happiness,  
And we by our good use of it may try,  
Both how to live well, young, and how to die;  
Yet since we must be old, and age endures  
His torrid zone at court, and calentures  
Of hot ambitions, irreligion's ice,  
Zeal's agues, and hydroptic avarice  
—Infirmities, which need the scale of truth,  
As well as lust and ignorance of youth—  
Why didst thou not for these give medicines too,  
And by thy doing set us what to do?

And then follows an elaborate comparison between 'small pocket-clocks' and youth, and 'great clocks' and the faults of age. It is, again, wonderfully ingenious, and richly embroidered with rare language. But we recognize in its texture the colours of decay, which the poets of the revolt from mere ornament were to reject with increasing strictness. Not even Spenser himself could have won back to Elizabethan standards the age of poetic propriety, in which the Duke of Normanby (Third Earl of Mulgrave, 1648-1721), anticipating Pope, declared the doom of Donne and his successors:

\* Introduction to *Donne*, vol. I. (Muses Library).

If once the justice of each part be lost,  
 Well may we laugh, but at the poet's cost,  
 That silly thing men call sheer wit avoid,  
 With which our age so nauseously is cloyed :  
 Humour is all : wit should be only brought  
 To turn agreeably some proper thought.

The contrast, of course, in contemporary writers especially, is not always plainly discernible. Carew has his clarities, and Waller his obscurities, and the broad line at 1660, which we discussed in the previous chapter, is not everywhere clearly drawn between the old and the new. But, generally, the contrast explains to the historical sense the extravagant praise which was lavished on Waller by those who were near him in time. The anonymous preface to an edition of his poems printed in 1690 does not hesitate to say that his 'name carries everything with it that is either great or graceful in poetry. He was, indeed, the parent of English verse. . . . Our language owes more to him than the French does to the whole Academy . . . Impartial reasoning will tell us, that there is as much due to the memory of Mr Waller as to the most celebrated names of antiquity'. And Dryden, writing in 1664, affirmed with generous sincerity that Waller 'first made writing easily an art ; first showed us how to conclude the sense, most commonly in distichs, which, in the verse of those before him, runs on for so many lines together, that the reader is out of breath to overtake it'.

To be first in any reform—even though its tendency be backward from the free play of the imagination—is a title to fame, and Waller's place in literary history is higher than his merits in literature itself. A not dissimilar meed is to be

accorded to Sir John Denham (1615-1669), whose *Cooper's Hill* is notable as the first local poem in English literature. To select a particular place as the subject of verse, to describe its changing features under various aspects of nature and man, and, to make it the definite centre of discursive reflections, was an innovation in poetry characteristic of the age. What was missing at this time was a choice of suitable subject-matter. A poet was hard pressed to find an appropriate vehicle for the not too exalted themes which he wished to discuss. The region of pure imagination was comfortless and desolate; polite society had turned its back on Eden and the garden of romance; the Forest of Arden was untenanted; no ship any more 'touch'd upon the deserts of Bohemia' \*; more than a century was to pass ere a poet's hand would take courage to set wide for the delight of humanity

magic casements, opening on the foam.  
Of perilous seas, in faëry lands forlorn †.

Waller, in a sober age, addressed his unambitious muse to public personages and events, and Denham, not less resourceful, introduced a new mode into poetry by attaching his muse to his domestic locality:

Sure there are poets which did never dream  
Upon Parnassus, nor did taste the stream  
Of Helicon; we therefore may suppose  
These made not poets, but the poets those.

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\* Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, III, iii, 1.

† Keats, (1795-1821), *Ode to a Nightingale*.

And, as courts make not kings, but kings the court,  
 So where the Muses and their train resort,  
 Parnassus stands ; if I can be to thee  
 A poet, thou Parnassus art to me.

This is the strain of conscious innovation in which *Cooper's Hill* begins, though its celebration of the Thames and its scenery from the neighbourhood of Windsor hardly justifies Dryden's dictum, that 'for the majesty of the style it is, and ever will be, the exact standard of good writing'. It contains the well-known description of a stag-hunt, and a fine pæan to the river :

Thames, the most lov'd of all the Ocean's sons  
 By his old sire, to his embraces runs ;  
 Hasting to pay his tribute to the sea,  
 Like mortal life to meet eternity. . . .  
 O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream  
 My great example, as it is my theme !  
 Tho' deep, yet clear ; tho' gentle, yet not dull ;  
 Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

The epithets in the last line have been applied, as Denham would have wished, to the poem, and to his style, as a whole ; and he certainly displayed in an eminent degree the highly-prized negative qualities of propriety and self-restraint.

Of Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), moral essayist and poet, and Samuel Butler (1612-1680), mock-heroic satirist of the shams and falsehoods of his day, not much need be said in this place. The one sought by retirement and the other by ridicule to oppose the superficial evils which marked the period of transition. The attention of each was fastened rather on the transitory features than on the elements of permanence. 'I never then proposed to myself any other advantage from his



Majesty's happy Restoration', wrote Cowley in his essay *Of Myself*, 'but the getting into some moderately-convenient retreat in the country', and in his quiet home at Chertsey he composed some pleasantly memorable lyric verses, translations, and moral pieces. Butler proposing to himself in *Hudibras* (the name of a knight in *The Faery Queen*) to laugh at all the follies of pride, pedantry and piety, succeeded in writing some lines universally applicable to human nature; but of the work itself Dr Johnson, a hundred and fifty years ago, asked a question in criticism which is yet more appropriate to-day: 'What should make the book valued when its subject is no more? . . . The book which was once quoted by princes, and which supplied conversation to all the assemblies of the gay and witty, is now seldom mentioned, and even by those who affect to mention it, is seldom read: so vainly is wit lavished upon fugitive topics'.

So we come at last, through the poets, poetasters, and prosewriters of the old and new schools, to the classic plains of John Dryden and his successors. We know something of their aims and aspirations: it remains, more briefly, to examine their achievements.

Dryden's generosity in praise has already attracted our notice. When we find him declaring of Waller that 'he first made writing easily an art', and of Denham's place-piece that 'it is, and ever will be, the exact standard of good writing', we feel that here is an author who is quick to follow and eager to be given a lead. A strong and self-conscious individuality does not so readily acclaim

the work of innovators and reformers, least of all when their reforms take shape in a certain avoidance of enthusiasm and a reluctance to let themselves go. Self-restraint, almost *ex hypothesi*, is not a contagious quality, and when Dryden lights his fire at the frigid altars of these poets, discovering 'majesty' in Denham and poetic mastery in Waller, since he 'first showed us how to conclude the sense, most commonly in distichs', we may infer with reasonable correctness that he was casting about for suitable forms of expression. As a fact he tells us so himself in his *Discourse Concerning Satire*, written in 1693: 'When I was myself in the rudiments of my poetry, without name or reputation in the world, having rather the ambition of a writer than the skill; when I was drawing the outlines of an art, without any living master to instruct me in it' . . . And, twice in the course of his long literary life, he unburdened his mind to Sir Robert Howard (1626-1698), a patron of letters and an inferior dramatist, on the subject of style in composition. The first occasion was in a letter prefatory to *Annus Mirabilis, The Year of Wonders*, 1666, and is dated from Charlton, in Wiltshire, on November 10 in that year. There he writes that 'as I have endeavoured to adorn it with noble thoughts, so much more to express those thoughts with elocution. The composition of all poems is, or ought to be, of wit', and Dryden acknowledges that Virgil 'has been my master in my poem. I have followed him everywhere, I know not with what success, but I am sure with diligence enough; my images are many of them copied from him, and the rest are imitations of him. . . . And this, Sir, I

have done with that boldness for which I will stand accountable to any of our little critics'. The second occasion is much later, in an *Epistle* 'to Sir Robert Howard, on his excellent poems':

Of moral knowledge poesy was queen,  
And still she might, had wanton wits not been ;  
Who, like ill guardians, lived themselves at large,  
And, not content with that, debauch'd their charge.  
Like some brave captain, your successful pen  
Restores the exiled to her crown again :  
And gives us hope that, having seen the days  
When nothing flourish'd but fanatic bays,  
All will at length in this opinion rest,  
' A sober prince's government is best '.

The doctrine of sobriety had gained on Dryden since he took Virgil as his model, but already in the poem of 1666, when he preferred the quatrain to the couplet on the ground that it involved more trouble, and therefore more care, in composition, he was faithful to his ideal of sober elocution. Take these stanzas from the description of the Great Fire in London in *Annus Mirabilis*:

A key of fire ran all along the shore,  
And lighten'd all the river with a blaze :  
The waken'd tides began again to roar,  
And wondering fish in shining waters gaze.

Old father Thames raised up his reverend head,  
But fear'd the fate of Simois would return :  
Deep in his ooze he sought his sedgy bed,  
And shrunk his waters back unto his urn.

The fire, meantime, walks in a broader gross ;  
To either hand his wings he opens wide :  
He wades the streets, and straight he reaches cross,  
And plays his longing flames on th' other side.

The second of these stanzas is pure Latin: the

lines almost invite a student of the classics to turn them into Roman elegiacs, with the vocabulary of Virgil and Ovid. This literal, or transliterated, classicism was too patent to endure, but its influence infected the blood of English poets, and wrought that change in writing which is marked by a greater accuracy and exactitude in the use of words. Language on their lips became less subtle and more neat. Fish wondered and waters shone, as in the fourth line of the first stanza, without further metaphysical complexities. Moreover, the propriety of epithets was raised to the rank of an independent study. Romance makes free use of colour in image and illustration; the classic style studiously avoids it, and depends for correct expression on the unadorned meaning of words. Take, for instance, 'his longing flames'. To that naked epithet is confided all the passion and the terror which romance would have taxed a sea of colours to convey. By the force of that solitary word we may measure the strength of the style which Dryden consciously revived—its manly sweetness, as he called it. Note, finally, the inclusion of the sense of each stanza in its own framework, purposely enlarged from the heroic couplet because of the larger demands of the theme. For this writer, whose art was Waller's, and who recognized majesty in Denham, deemed no theme sufficiently large to permit an onrush of sense from one stanza, or from one couplet, to another. The age which organized its forces, and tied the strings of its purse, could not afford its breath.

Flowers of this diction may be gathered up and down the pages of Dryden's poems:



What weight of ancient witness can prevail,  
If private reason hold the public scale ?

*The Hind and the Panther.*

'Tis paradise to look  
On the fair frontispiece of Nature's book,  
If the first opening page so charms the sight,  
Think how the unfolded volume will delight !

*Britannia Rediviva.*

How bless'd is he, who leads a country life,  
Unvex'd with anxious cares, and void of strife,  
Who studying peace, and shunning civil rage,  
Enjoy'd his youth, and now enjoys his age.

*To John Dryden.*

Thus Heaven, though all-sufficient, shows a thrift  
In his economy, and bounds his gift.

*Eleonora.*

Kings fight for kingdoms, madmen for applause :  
But love for love alone ; that crowns the lover's cause.

*Palamon and Arcite.*

If we try to analyse the power of these verses, we shall find that a part of it resides in the exact use of words of Greek or Latin derivation, adding dignity to the sound, and precision to the sense, and investing the whole in a classical atmosphere. The success of this investment is apt to differ in degree. Sometimes it is partial, and at other times complete, and the difference seems to lie in the lesser or greater assimilation of the particular words in our language. A fine sense detects the complete process in 'ancient witness. . . private reason. . . public scale. . . void of strife', and an incomplete process in 'studying peace. . . civil rage'. These epithets have still a Latin shell. So the French 'fraicheur', as we saw in the last chapter, was swallowed by Dryden whole. But, apart from degrees of success, the method is clear,

and point was added to polish by the economy of breath which we spoke of above. It may further be stated that the employment of rhyme, at least in this emphasized form, possessed the advantage of novelty. The Elizabethans used it very sparingly and Milton hardly at all: since *The Canterbury Tales*, it had been practically disused in narrative and reflective verse. To-day it is almost a stale device, and poetry tries to disguise it by throwing its burden on unimportant words without pausing upon them. Dryden and his successors were more fortunate in this respect. The pleasure which was derived from their polished and pointed couplets was increased, rather than diminished, by the regular recurrence of similar sounds in stress.

Dryden was born in 1631 and died in 1700. In the course of his full and active life he wrote plays for the gallants in the theatres, and treatises for the wits in the coffee-houses, panegyrics on the King, and satires on his enemies, especially on the Earl of Shaftesbury in *Absalom and Achitophel*—Absalom being the Duke of Monmouth and Achitophel Shaftesbury, while Israel, Jerusalem and the Jews stand for England, London and the English—and also in *The Medal, a Satire against Sedition*. He defended the Anglican creed in *Religio Laici* (a layman's faith) in 1682, and in 1686 was converted to Roman Catholicism, in defence of which he wrote *The Hind and The Panther, a Poem, in three parts*, in which a milk-white hind, as the Church of Rome, discourses with a panther, as the Anglican Church, on the doctrines in dispute between the two. He was musician, poet-laureate, historiographer, and translator of

Virgil, to whose genius, as we have seen, his constant affection was devoted. A big man in no mean age, he died at the edge of the eighteenth century in which the ideals for which he strove, the literary standards at which he aimed, were accepted and approved in practice. To-day he is, perhaps, best remembered as the author of *Annus Mirabilis*; *Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Music*; and *A Song for Saint Cecilia's Day*—twin odes nearly every line in which contains a memorable phrase :

None but the brave deserves the fair.

Fought all his battles o'er again ;  
And thrice he routed all his foes ; and thrice he slew the slain.

Like another Helen, fired another Troy.

He raised a mortal to the skies ;  
She drew an angel down.

Through all the compass of the notes it ran,  
The diapason closing full in Man.

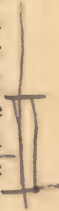
Of his plays *Aurungzebe* is still read ; his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, in which he defended the use of rhyme in that class of composition, is a notable essay in criticism, and his version of the *Æneid* is still an English classic.

Gossip preserves a pleasant memory of John Dryden—it is little more than two hundred years ago—seated in Will's at the corner of Russell Street and Bow Street, in the cosiest inglenook of the room, as the acknowledged chief and referee of those who frequented that resort. The picture adds a valuable association to Steele's undertaking

in *The Tatler* that articles on poetry should be under the heading of Will's, and to Addison's similar remarks in the first number of *The Spectator* (March 1, 1711): 'There is no place of general resort wherein I do not often make my appearance; sometimes I am seen thrusting my head into a round of politicians at Will's, and listening with great attention to the narratives that are made in those little circular audiences. Sometimes I smoke a pipe at Child's, and . . . overhear the conversation of every table in the room. I appear on Sunday nights at St James's Coffee-House, and sometimes join the little committee of politics in the inner room, as one who comes there to hear and improve. My face is likewise very well known at the Grecian, the Cocoa-Tree, and in the theatres, both of Drury Lane and the Haymarket. I have been taken for a merchant upon the Exchange for above these ten years, and sometimes pass for a Jew in the assembly of stock-jobbers at Jonathan's. In short, wherever I see a cluster of people I always mix with them, though I never open my lips but in my own club! \*.

\* *The Spectator*, vol. I. Edited by G. A. Aitken (Routledge, 1s. net.) Mr Aitken's notes inform us, on the authority of Steele, that Will's had changed its character in the few years since Dryden frequented it, and that Addison made his headquarters at Button's on the other side of the street. Child's was in St Paul's Churchyard convenient for the physicians (from the college in Warwick Lane) and the clergymen who used it; the St James's was the resort of Whig politicians and officers of the Guards; the Grecian—visited by Newton—was the sign of 'learning' in *The Tatler*; the Cocoa-Tree was the Tory chocolate-house; and Jonathan's and Garraway's, in Change Alley, were used by stock-jobbers and substantial merchants,



The last sentence of this extract from the first issue of *The Spectator* may be applied, by a legitimate extension of meaning, to characterize the literature of the period after Dryden. Defoe, Swift, Addison and Steele, who represent the literary tendencies culminating in Pope, might each have taken as his motto, ' Wherever I see a cluster of people, I always mix with them. I never open my lips but in my club '. ( Literature, in a word, became professionalized ; it assumed social and classical qualities in contrast to its individual and romantic features in previous generations.  )

Journalism was an obvious expression of this change, for the foundation of criticism postulates a definite set of opinions, an accepted standard of taste, and a section of the public to receive them—indeed, to depend upon them for mental sustenance at regular intervals of time. Signs of this movement may be gathered from the lives of Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), Joseph Addison (1672–1729), Sir Richard Steele (1672–1729), and Daniel Defoe (1661(?)–1731). Swift and Defoe, though they wrote *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe* respectively—works to which we shall return in our discussion of the English novel—were pamphleteers and journalists in the first instance, men, that is, who reflected, in a serious and satiric vein, on the passing show of life. Dean Swift's *Journal to Stella* (1710–1713) is a series of confidential letters, with affinity to Pepys's *Diary* on

respectively. Addison's Drury Lane Theatre was built by Wren, and opened in 1674 ; the Haymarket, by Vanbrugh, in 1706. Every page of Pepys's *Diary* is instructive in these matters.

the one part and, on the other part, to his own brilliant and mordant prose-pieces of humour and satire, *The Battle of the Books* and *The Tale of a Tub*. Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* was the most serious historical writing of a journalist whose pen was always ready and who started and edited *The Review*. And, if the authors of *Gulliver* and *Crusoe* were journalists first and romance-writers in the second instance, Addison and Steele—the other pair in this quartet of talent—were journalists first and last, despite their experiments in other directions. All the conditions of the time favoured the periodical press. Opinions were well defined. Party government had begun. Professions were becoming specialized. Communication was easier. Intelligent curiosity was at work. Daily, weekly, or monthly, men began to like to know what was going on, and what was 'the right thing' to think, in the several departments of knowledge—poetry at Will's learning at the Grecian, and so forth. These early papers were not long-lived. Jealousy and authority were strong forces in the first years of independent public opinion. But the new fashion had come to stay, and it never touched a higher level than in the first *Tatlers* and *Spectators*.

It is not proposed to suggest 'how to read' those works. The taste which they gratify is so modern—though it would seem to descend to-day to a bottomless pit of vulgarity and triviality—that no difficulty will be felt in placing oneself in a receptive attitude. Steele and Addison invite us to listen to cultivated talk on topics of common interest—politics, morals, society, art. They tinge

it with a pleasant humour which is never unkind — 'I have endeavoured', wrote Addison, 'to make nothing ridiculous which is not in some way criminal' — ; with a philosophy that is never pedantic ; and, perhaps best of all, with a worldliness that is never ill-bred. These men of the world are never less than gentlemen. 'I have long entertained an ambition', wrote Steele, 'to make the word wife the most agreeable and delightful name in nature'; and, remembering the age in which he lived, its drama and its so-called gallantry, and all its excesses due to the revolt from Puritanism, this ambition is remarkable. Such essays are the fine flower of a liberal education, the most harmonious expression of times in which social tact and propriety and standards of convention were valued above the ebullition of individual genius. Occasional papers, *obiter dicta* of scholars and gentlemen, have been many in English literature since the genial talents of Addison and Steele were so happily combined. Charles Lamb (1775-1834) lent the form a more airy and less imitable grace ; but the tone of pleasant didactics and of familiar wit which *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* introduced, through the essay, into literature has never been lost and cannot be spared.

## CHAPTER XI

### POPE AND JOHNSON

'It is a constant law that the greatest men, whether poets or historians, live entirely in their own age, and that the greatest fruits of their work are gathered out of their own age.'

RUSKIN

WE have reached a fairly clear perception of the state of English letters in the reign of Queen Anne, and of what is meant by the 'Augustan' period. More importantly, perhaps, we have seized the salient marks in the history of that age, out of which the literature was made. In the present chapter we propose to examine more closely the period of Pope and Johnson. Alexander Pope (1688-1744) represents in many respects the correct times which he adorned. He was taken as typical of his times by those who, as we shall see, led the reaction against them a hundred years after his birth, and the names of other great and minor writers are necessarily connected with his career. His brilliant successor in the autocracy of letters was Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), whose death occurred—within four years—a century after Pope's birth. Thus, in the lives of these two men, we shall review the best features of their age, in a literary sense; we shall review, what is not



always the same thing, their most prominent features, in a historical sense ; and, incidentally, we shall become acquainted with other makers of Augustan literature.

There is an old battle about Pope. It raged in the early nineteenth century, and its echoes are heard to-day, and the worst of it is that, though a truce has been patched up, the issue has never been decided. The question is, Is Pope a poet ?, and it involves, of course, the further question as to what poetry is. The object of the present volume is to learn 'how to read English literature', and this object, presuming that Pope has his recognized place in that corpus, is not in any sense served by attempts to go behind English literature to abstract theories of poetics. Pope's writings are before us : if we choose to leave them aside we shall miss the example which we seek of an English man of letters who represented in his one person the various threads and tendencies which we have gathered and collected from many directions. We have been working up to Pope through two chapters. We expect to find in him Waller's occasional felicity, Denham's domestic suavity, the urbane gentility of Addison, Dryden's classical propriety. We expect to find in him that less tangible spirit in affairs which governed the administration of various public activities ; the growing sense of order, the ripening judgment, the concentration of purpose, the reasonable view and the desire for peace. If Green is right, and Robert Walpole, the great Whig statesman of the age was 'the first of our Peace Ministers and the first of our Financiers', if 'his prosaic good sense turned sceptically away from

the poetic and passionate sides of human feeling', and, if, finally, the Whig administration 'made constitutional government a part of the very life of Englishmen!' \*, then we expect to find in Pope a reflection of Walpole's policy and of all that it implied in England's progress.

Here, surely, is our answer to this question: Pope was a poet of his own times: it is as idle to deny the title of a statesman to Robert Walpole, on the ground that his policy would not be suited to the conditions of to-day, as to deny to Pope the title of a poet on the ground that the qualities which he cultivated are rejected by the modern muse. The modern muse in her turn may fall on a period of the reconstruction of national ideals. The conception of the poet's craft, as revised and sustained successively by Keats, Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, Meredith, may pass through a fresh revision by poets yet unborn, and the satire and the epistle, social and familiar verse, may once more rule in the place of the wind-swept, sea-tossed lyre. The 'magic casements' thrown wide by Keats may be closed and sealed once more; none may dare any more enter the enchanted 'woods of Westermains'†; new times may require new-old standards, as the tide ebbs and flows. But it is an evasion of the inquiry 'how to read', and a denial of the historical method, to judge Pope by Spenser or by Burns, and to declare, with Matthew Arnold, that 'though they may write in verse, though they

\* *History of the English People*. Bk. VIII, ch. IV.

† George Meredith.

may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose' \*. Arnold, great critic though he be, is confusing 'our poetry', which means, if it mean anything, the British *corpus poetarum*, with the particular theory of poetics which it was his purpose to defend. That theory may have required the exclusion of all writings which were not composed in the imaginative vein, which did not—let us keep hold of these conditions, for we shall meet them again—look through the 'magic casements' and range freely in 'Westermarck'; but no theory of 'our poetry' could include with 'our prose' the classics of Augustan verse. And in this study, we are dealing with 'our poetry', as it followed our history, our national development, our moral growth, our imperial expansion. In these forces Pope is as essential as Shakespeare and Wordsworth themselves. He stands between the two great centuries of individual expression, the seventeenth and the nineteenth, raising his urbane voice on the side of self-rule and correctness, and helping consciously the causes of civic virtue and national concentration. The true measure of value for the poetry of the eighteenth century is not the revolt of Keats but the degeneracy of Donne—not the 'romantic' revival of the nineteenth century, but the 'fantastic' decline of the seventeenth. Pope, by adding purpose to power, prepared the way in English poetry for the new voices to be.

The first point which strikes us in his life is the

\* *Essays in Criticism* : 'The Study of Poetry.'

early start which he made. His *Essay on Criticism*, the first considerable piece which he wrote, was composed when he was twenty or twenty-two—the later date is the more likely—but in either case it was written at an age when a future author of to-day is reading for ‘Mods’ at Oxford. His poem, despite its precocity, is singularly free from signs of immaturity or want of preparation, and it contains some lines and passages which have passed into current use. The poetic theory which he defends is, of course, that of his own age, and it was still some way from general acceptance at that date. Indeed, it may fairly be said that the harsher critics of the *Essay* judge it less by the standard of English poetry in 1711, when Pope consented to its publication, than by that of a generation later, in 1744, when Pope’s life and life-work were complete. In other words they tend to regard it as the last word of Augustan criticism instead of as nearly the first. Thus, Professor Saintsbury writes: ‘All Pope seems to have done is to take the *Arts* of Horace, Vida, and Boileau, to adopt as many of their principles as he understood, and as would go into his sharp antithetic couplet, to drag their historical illustrations head and shoulders into his scheme without caring for the facts, and to fill in and embroider with criticisms, observations, and precepts, sometimes very shrewd, almost always perfectly expressed, but far too often arbitrary, conventional, and limited’\*. This is to judge Pope’s criticism, in the morning of his career, by the literature which included Pope at the close

\* *History of Criticism*, II, 455.



of his period. A far more valuable piece of evidence is the contemporary review in *The Spectator*, written by Addison himself, which appeared on December 20, 1711. The boy-author must have been gratified to find his work bracketed with the works of Lord Roscommon and of the Duke of Buckinghamshire, as 'three poems of the same nature, each of them a masterpiece in its kind'. Pope's observations are described as 'some of them uncommon, but such as the reader must assent to, when he sees them explained with that regularity and perspicuity in which they are delivered'. Even those which are most known 'are placed in so beautiful a light, and illustrated with such apt allusions, that they have in them all the graces of novelty'. And Addison acutely notes Pope's eminent skill in fulfilling his own precept that 'sound must seem an echo to the sense'.

To pass to the *Essay* from its critics, whether contemporary or two hundred years after :

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same.  
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,  
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,  
Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,  
At once the source, and end, and text of Art. . . .  
Those Rules of old discover'd, not devised,  
Are Nature still, but nature methodized ;  
Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd  
By the same laws which first herself ordain'd.

This is the central precept of the first part of the poem, and the harmony of its teaching with the forces gradually prevailing in the temper and conduct of the nation should be evident by now. The nature which Pope bade men follow in the

age in which he lived was the Nature of Locke's inquiry and of Newton's experiments, the nature which was to triumph over the 'wit' of the followers of 'art for art's sake', who had ruled English letters too long. Law and order were to be imposed on the anarchy and chaos of judgment, for though

Music resembles poetry : in each  
Are nameless graces which no methods teach,  
And which a master-hand alone can reach ;

though

Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,  
And rise to faults true critics dare not mend ;

though

Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,  
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream,

yet—we are always quoting from the *Essay*—

A little learning is a dangerous thing :  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring  
Fired at first sight with what the Muse imparts,  
In fearless youth we tempt the heights of arts,  
While from the bounded level of our mind  
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind ;  
But, more advanced, behold with strange surprise  
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise.

\* \* \* \* \*

True wit is nature to advantage dress'd  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

The poem tempts to quotation, not merely as the work of a youth in the youth of his age, but for the sake of its own merits as sound and serious criticism. There is the excellence of occasional lines :

Dulness is ever apt to magnify  
His praise is lost, who stays till all commend  
To err is human, to forgive—divine  
Wit had pensions, and young lords had wit

(surely one of the most savage epigrams ever penned)

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread  
Stones leap'd to form, and rocks began to live

—and there is the excellence of sustained passages such as the following, which Addison, when Pope was a lad, did not hesitate to compare with Longinus :

These equal syllables alone require,  
Though oft the ear the open vowels tire ;  
While expletives their feeble aid do join ;  
And ten low words oft creep in one dull line :  
While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,  
With sure returns of still expected rhymes :  
Where'er you find ' the cooling western breeze ',  
In the next line, it ' whispers through the trees ' :  
If crystal streams ' with pleasing murmurs creep,'  
The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with ' sleep.'  
Then, at the last and only couplet fraught  
With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,  
A needless Alexandrine ends the song,  
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.  
Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know  
What's roundly smooth, or languishingly slow ;  
And praise the easy vigour of a line,  
Where Denham's strength and Waller's sweetness join.  
True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,  
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance  
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,  
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.  
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows ;  
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar :

When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw  
 The line too labours, and the words move slow :  
 Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,  
 Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the main.

Alas ! that so promising a career was marred before its close by the weaknesses of character attendant on ill health, and by the jealousies inevitable to a society thrown in upon itself, and not visited by the wholesome breath of adventure and romance. Even Addison, so gracious here in so critical a period of a young author's bid for fame, was to figure in the bitter *Epistle to Arbuthnot* as

Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,  
 Just hint the fault, and hesitate dislike ;

and friend after friend was to be alienated by *The Dunciad* in its various recensions.

We have paused thus long in the portals of Pope's work from a reluctance to stir the dust of old, forgotten personalities. Perhaps, with this reference, the subject may still be avoided, for its bearing on higher literature is a little remote to-day. Pope's success as a critic brought him from Binfield to London—from the little parish near Wokingham, in Berkshire, with Windsor Forest for his wanderings in the neighbourhood, to the centre of politics and letters ; and from a secluded colony of families, mainly of his own faith, the Roman Catholic, to the mixed society of party-life which composed 'the world' two hundred years ago. Once in London, he fell in with the survivors of the 'old guard' at Will's—where once he had seen Dryden,—and with the members of its new extensions at the Kit-Kat

Club and at Button's (1712), where Addison presided over his famous 'little senate'. He fell in with Addison, Steele, Swift, Gay; with Ambrose Philips, John Dennis, Tickell, John Caryl, and the rest; with Wycherley, the elderly dramatist; Henry Cromwell, his friend; Curll, the publisher; Jervas, the painter—Sir Godfrey Kneller's pupil,—and many other frequenters of the various clubs and coteries. He was 'in' the busy, spiteful, inquisitive, *journalier* life of London, and by temperament and disposition he was likely to be spoiled by it to some extent. His physical defects—for he was always a sufferer—would become more obvious and painful, and would produce their inevitable reaction on his mind and temper. Jealousy, morbidity, irritableness, suspicion, marked him down from the start. His sterling benefactions to English literature do not require us to search out the effects in detail of these misgrowths.

It is more significant to note that his friends included the statesmen and politicians of the age, at a time when the tradition of 'patronage' was giving way to a new era of independence. The booksellers, who were becoming publishers in the modern sense of the word, were beginning to take advantage of the new taste and larger public for literature by commissioning authors on their own account. Books were beginning to be planned, not in the audience chambers of great men, but in the offices and shops of wholesale booksellers; and, consequently, the 'Grub-street' element of impecunious hack-work writers, whose independent and Bohemian spirit, though it has, perhaps, been



exaggerated, was at least something good and new, was now in course of development out of the club and coffee-house régime. Pope's intimate acquaintance with Atterbury, Oxford, Bolingbroke, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and the rest, during the years of his residence at Twickenham, raised him as much above 'Grub-Street' as Johnson, the son of a Lichfield bookseller, raised 'Grub-Street' above itself by his sturdy refusal of patronage, and his undeviating loyalty to the standard of a self-made literary career.

It was the aristocratic influence which produced Pope's elaborate trifle *The Rape of the Lock* (1712, revised 1714). It was the booksellers' influence which produced his version of *The Iliad* in English heroic verse (1715-1720), his edition of Shakespeare for Tonson, and his *Odyssey* (1725-26). It was the conflict between these two influences which produced *The Dunciad* (1712, 1729, 1735, 1742), a kind of life-companion to the poet, in which he included some of his best and worst verse; and, finally, it was Bolingbroke's influence which inspired (1733) the *Essay on Man* and the four *Moral Essays*, in which he attempted to represent in the classical verse of his age the philosophic propriety of speculation on nature and man which characterized Bolingbroke's opinions. Beyond these, there are satires and epistles, letters, correspondence, and so forth, constituting, on the whole, a literary 'output' remarkable for its bulk and for the high degree of excellence in metre and diction which Pope jealously exacted. He died at Twickenham in 1744.

A theory, not altogether fanciful, joins the criti-

cism of Pope's poetry, or, rather, of his philosophy, with the criticism of his garden. He owned five acres at Twickenham, 'inclosed', as Walpole wrote, 'with three lanes; and seeing nothing. Pope had twisted and twirled, and rhymed and harmonized this, till it appeared two or three sweet little lawns opening and opening beyond one another'. This phrase occurs in a letter from Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann\*, but—read in connection with Pope's own precepts of art—it may reasonably be extended to describe his constructive powers as a whole. He lived, it is not unfair to say, in a *hortus inclusus* all his life, 'inclosed with three lanes, and seeing nothing'. Deliberately, or, rather, inevitably, according to the conditions of his age, he set limits and bounds to the possible vagaries of the lanes. He felt no desire to escape, no caged bird's longing to try his wings, and to seek adventures in the unknown which lay outside of the enclosure. It was enough for him to 'twist and twirl and rhyme' the subject-matter which was before him. All his words have boundaries, all his sentences are self-contained. It is a natural method applied to gardening, but it has its inherent weakness in an incurious acceptance of limitations; and Pope's *Essay on Man*, illustrates in a special degree the 'rhyming and harmonizing' method applied to an enclosure 'seeing nothing'. Not to press the metaphor too far, let me point my meaning by a contrast. John Henry Newman, afterwards Cardinal Newman (1801-1890), one of the great company of

\* June 20, 1760. John Grant, Vol. III, p. 318.

writers who led or followed the reaction against eighteenth century standards, wrote, in 1848, a story called *Loss and Gain*, which was designed 'as a description of what is understood by few, viz., the course of thought and state of mind which issues in conviction of its divine origin'. With the merits of this tract we are not immediately concerned, but a passage occurs in its third chapter which is useful to our present context:

When we ourselves were young, we once on a time walked on a hot summer day from Oxford to Newington—a dull road, as any one who has gone it knows; yet it was new to us; and we protest to you, reader, believe it or not, laugh or not, as you will, to us it seemed on that occasion quite touchingly beautiful; and a soft melancholy came over us, of which the shadows fall even now, when we look back on that dusty, weary journey. And why? because every object which met us was unknown and full of mystery. A tree or two in the distance seemed the beginning of a great wood or park, stretching endlessly; a hill implied a vale beyond, with that vale's history; the bye-lanes, with their green hedges, wound and vanished, yet were not lost to the imagination.

There was no 'seeing nothing' in this prospect; and in this sense at least, Pope, we may say, was never 'young'. Certainly, he never was young in the sense in which the nineteenth century, as we shall presently discover, renewed the youth of art. Contrast Newman's walk to Newington with Pope twisting his garden-paths, and much of the difference will be apparent which divides the two centuries of thought. Contrast all that is implied, in thought and style, by 'the beginning of a great wood, stretching endlessly', by the 'vale beyond, with that vale's history', and by 'bye-lanes not lost to the imagination'—types

of images of poetic vision to which we shall recur in a later chapter—with the following passages from Pope's *Essay* :

The bliss of Man (could pride that blessing find)  
Is not to act or think beyond mankind ;  
No powers of body or of soul to share,  
But what his nature and his state can bear.  
Why has not man a microscopic eye ?  
For this plain reason, Man is not a fly.  
Say what the use, were finer optics given,  
To inspect a mite, not comprehend the heaven ?  
Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er,  
To smart and agonize at every pore ?  
Or quick effluvia darting through the brain,  
Die of a rose in aromatic pain ?  
If nature thunder'd in his opening ears,  
And stunn'd him with the music of the spheres,  
How would he wish that Heaven had left him still  
The whispering zephyr, and the purling rill ?  
Who finds not Providence all good and wise,  
Alike in what it gives, and what denies ?

*Essay on Man*, I, vi.

All nature is but art, unknown to thee ;  
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see ;  
All discord, harmony not understood ;  
All partial evil, universal good :  
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.

*Ibid.*, I, x.

Behold the child, by nature's kindly law,  
Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw :  
Some livelier plaything gives his youth delight,  
A little louder, but as empty quite :  
Scarfs, garters, gold, amuse his riper stage,  
And beads and prayer-books are the toys of age :  
Pleased with this bauble still, as that before,  
Till tired he sleeps, and life's poor play is o'er.

Meanwhile opinion gilds with varying rays  
Those painted clouds that beautify our days ;  
Each want of happiness by hope supplied,  
And each vacuity of sense by pride :  
These build as fast as knowledge can destroy ;  
In folly's cup still laughs the bubble, joy.

*Ibid.*, II., v.

Add to these the conclusion of the whole matter, from the last lines of the *Essay* :

For wit's false mirror held up Nature's light ;  
 Show'd erring pride, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT ;  
 That REASON, PASSION, answer one great aim ;  
 That true SELF-LOVE and SOCIAL are the same ;  
 That VIRTUE only makes our bliss below ;  
 And all our knowledge is, OURSELVES TO KNOW.

Take into the account a few well-known single lines or couplets :

Vindicate the ways of God to Man  
 Hope springs eternal in the human breast :  
 Man never is, but always to be blest  
 The proper study of mankind is Man  
 For forms of government let fools contest ;  
 Whate'er is best administer'd is best  
 Worth makes the man, and want of it the fellow ;  
 The rest is all but leather and prunella

and the contrast we are pointing should be clear. There are a self-sufficiency and a self-contentment about Pope's exquisitely finished phrases which would be unattainable to thought ranging freely from 'the bye-lanes, with their green hedges', to the remoter confines of imagination. The 'hedges' shut in and shut-out the view in such observations of superior finality as the 'plain reason' why man should be content with a man's seeing ; as the one 'clear truth' in all nature, all chance, all discord, all evil, all knowledge ; and as the unperturbed summary of 'life's poor play'. And these hedges, one suspects, are not always naturally 'green'. They are at times artificially coloured by a prejudged system of philosophy, the



sheltered fabric of which might conceivably be shattered by the rude breath of adventurous experience or the virile spirit of romance. 'Get order' is the text of Pope's gospel; 'get order', and all else will follow; and to the decorous passion for order in all gardens from Twickenham to Eden he offered a willing sacrifice of the allurements of the unknown. Words lost their edging of mystery; thought, its province of the imagination. The physical frontiers which the Elizabethans attacked and explored, the metaphysical boundaries which, as we shall see in a later chapter, irresistibly attracted the nineteenth century—in Wordsworth's

sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man  
(*Tintern Abbey*);

in Browning's

future state revealed to us by Zeus,  
Unlimited in capability  
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,  
To seek which the joy-hunger forces us  
(*Cleon*);

in Meredith's

A wonder edges the familiar face:  
She wears no more her robe of printed hours;  
Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers  
(*Meditation under Stars*);

—these were excluded from the senses of an age which deliberately rejected the pangs of a rose, which found joy the bubble in folly's cup, which made divine discontent an error of pride, and which, in a conscious delirium of 'order', termed

Providence all good and wise,  
Alike in what it gives, and what denies,

On the other hand, no writer before or since has succeeded as invariably as Pope in choosing the perfect expression for his completely conceived thought. Let any one try to think out a difficult argument in philosophy or letters, and make his meaning and conclusion absolutely lucid and convincing within the confines of the metre known as the heroic couplet, and the exercise is likely to reward him with an edifying sense of admiration. He will, further, be disinclined to support the popular view of Pope's insignificance as a poet. He was the ape and idol of his age. He helped it to express itself, and his antics were hardly less diverting than his serious poems were triumphant as studies—etched in black and white—of the life and thought in which he moved.

Pope was the last of his generation—the generation of aristocracy in letters. The narrow soil which he cultivated was exhausted even before he died. The 'lanes' without, which he excluded, were thronged, we might almost say, with a motley crew of petitioners for admittance to the republic of literature. From the mills and workshops of the Midlands came a crowd of factory 'hands' who were soon to assert their right to be counted as heads and hearts; from England's wars in foreign countries her sailors and soldiers came back, claiming the fruit of their exploits in improved colonial administration with all the consequences it entailed on political life at home; and the social and economic threads, when they were gathered at last by writers of genius, were woven into new

patterns, transcending the confines of Pope's 'garden', and enlarging the bases of literature to make room for the accretion of fresh material.

All this came later and elsewhere. But already in 1644, the year of the death of Pope, Jean Jacques Rousseau was a man of thirty-two and Immanuel Kant a student of twenty; and if 'le lyrisme' in France—the revival of the 'Romantic' sense—is traced to the author of *The Social Contract* and *Emile*, the greater name of Kant is for ever associated with the humanistic tendency of German thought which found literary and artistic expression in Klopstock, Winkelmann, Lessing, Schiller, Goethe. Nor were England and Scotland unaffected by the social changes which led to the Revolution in France. It is true that, in Pope pre-eminently, and still, in a less degree, in Johnson, we are struck by a sense of detachment from the actual course of big events. Literature was divorced from life—from the new life which was maturing, far off, upon obscure battlefields, and very near, among the unlit and the unlovely. Remote from contemporary letters, but close to those hidden fires at which genius is kindled, the new forces were at work. Richard Arkwright, the barber's apprentice, who ended as a knight of industry; Matthew Boulton, journeyman engineer, who supplied machinery to the Mint; James Brindley, engine-repairer, who constructed the Bridgewater canal; Abraham Darby, father, son, and grandson, at the Coalbrookdale Ironworks in Shropshire; James Hargreaves, inventor of the spinning-jenny; John Kay, inventor of the fly-shuttle; Thomas Lombe, silk-manufacturer, who became sheriff of London

and a knight ; James Watt, inventor of the steam-engine ; Josiah Wedgwood, John Wilkinson, John Wyatt—these Johns and Thomases of the workshop were the trustees of England's expansion at one end of the scale, as knightly and heroic in their way as the captains of the sea under Elizabeth. And ever in the background of their toil is the grim, pathetic spectacle of the human continent which they explored. As our Empire across the seas brought with it in its train problems of colonial administration, of the rule of white men over black, of slave-labour and other pressing topics, so our industrial empire—won by the inventive exertions of no less redoubtable pioneers—was accompanied by problems of capital and labour, of employment, taxation, and representation, some of which are unsolved to-day. And at the other end of the scale were those who enlarged our frontiers at the sword's point in foreign parts. Wolfe and Clive were alive when Pope died, and we go back to Seeley for an account of the expansion of England in the eighteenth century, which never mentions the names of Pope, Johnson, or their confrères. 'The whole period', he declares, 'stands out as an age of gigantic rivalry between England and France, a kind of second Hundred Years' War. . . . The expansion of England in the New World and in Asia is the formula which sums up for England the history of the eighteenth century' \*.

If we add the expansion by industry † to the

\* See Chapter x, p. 226, above.

† The student may be referred to a charming new book on this subject, *La Révolution Industrielle au XVIIIe Siècle : Essai sur les Commencements de la Grande Indus-*

expansion by war, Seeley's 'formula' will be complete. The successive emergence of the middle classes and of the democracy gradually shifted the centre of national life. Ideals followed realities, literature reflected life. The appeal of the new things, it has been noted, was not in the first instance literary. It required a longer experience and a more cultivated sentiment than Pope or Johnson could command to discern what we may call for once—for technical terms, as such, are always to be avoided—the 'literary value' of the democratic movement. It was to be discovered soon enough, and it has since been exhaustively employed. The sentiment of Rousseau and the humanism of Kant bore ample fruits in due season. The 'masses', as they came to be called—in distinction to the 'classes' with their 'classical' literature,—dispossessed of their old security, and startled by the roar of machinery out of the ignorance which was itself a protection, were still to be admitted to the franchise of education and to the benefits of Factory Acts and Reform Acts. But their full time was not yet. Signs of the budding and the burgeoning we shall mark in the next chapter; at present, in London, with Dr Johnson, it is more appropriate to point out one of the several causes which kept the season back. Neither the expansion by warfare nor the expansion by trade contained at this period an appeal to the sense of a common cause. Old conventions were disappearing. The picturesqueness of the feudal system, with its rich who were rich by might

*trivie Moderne en Angleterre.* By Paul Mantoux, Paris, 1906.



and its poor who were poor by meekness, was for ever at an end. But the ugly side of the new order was turned uppermost. The machinery to save time and labour could not be applied to industry without grave disturbance of that stratum of the social fabric which had hardly been regarded hitherto. Hargreaves's house and machinery were mobbed in 1768; Sir Thomas Arkwright's mill at Chorley was sacked in 1779. War, again, brought taxation and suffering, and its issues were obscure. It lacked that direct call to arms which adds glamour to victory.

Here and there, it is true, the new conditions found a voice. Adam Smith (1723-1790), the Free Trade economist, wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in 1766 with full perception of the need of a science of political economy to regulate the problems of poverty and wealth, money, wages, and prices. David Hume (1711-1776), the Scottish philosopher and historian, was thoroughly alert to the new range of speculation which the intellectual movement introduced. There were poets—Gray, Collins, Percy, Beattie, Macpherson,—who chafed at the classical restrictions. There were novelists and men of letters—Richardson, Goldsmith, Mackenzie, Fielding, Smollett, and the rest—who broke similarly with convention. There were Edmund Burke (1729-1797), who belongs to politics, and Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), who belongs to art, the one of whom, in virtue of his speeches, and the other, in virtue of his *Discourses*, claims a part in the literary province. There was John Wesley (1703-1791), the evangelist and leader of Methodism; and, not least, there was

David Garrick (1717-1779), the actor, friend and pupil to Dr Johnson, who wrote plays and poems, and whose chief services to literature were rendered on the stage in Shakespearean parts.

But it is not for these signs of a new spring, to some of which we shall return, that English literature is mindful of Samuel Johnson. He lives on the canvas of Reynolds and in the pages of Boswell (1740-1795), and is famous as having inspired the best biography which ever delighted humankind. He possessed the genius of conversation, and Boswell's Johnson, with Sir Joshua's portrait, is greater than the compiler of the *Dictionary* and of the *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. Born in 1709, the son of a Lichfield bookseller, Johnson came up to London in 1737 with Garrick, his pupil, and for nearly half a century, till he was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1784, the London of which Fleet Street was the centre remained his well-beloved home. Faithful to the tradition of the century and to his own gregarious temper, he formed literary clubs, of which the first in 1749 was the Ivy Lane Club—Ivy Lane is near Paternoster Row—and the second was the Literary Club which met till the year before his death at the Turk's Head, in Gerrard Street, just north of the Strand. Among the members of this circle were Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), the historian of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Garrick, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Sir Joshua himself, and other leaders, of the era. Johnson's magazine, *The Rambler*, ran for two or three years, and his *Idler* for two or three years later. He refused the patronage of Lord Chesterfield in 1755, preferring

independence and self-help, and nearly five-and-twenty years afterwards he made his own terms with the booksellers for the *Lives of the Poets*—his last considerable task-work— of which the latest historian of criticism remarks that, subject to certain allowances for prejudice and temperament, ‘for diffused brilliancy of literary expression they are hardly to be excelled in any language’\*.

They form, in the same writer’s phrase, ‘one of the most fortunate books in English literature’, for Johnson by the accident of time was able to include critical biographies of Thomas Gray and William Collins, his slightly younger contemporaries, who yet died before him, as well as of Milton, Dryden, and Pope, his elders by birth. For the rest—the gossip, grave and gay, the tea-parties, the scandals, the diversions, the stout Tory impatience of cranks and contradiction, the uncouthness, the browbeating, the extravagance, the familiar table-talk of a man whose literary style was pompous, ponderous, ‘Johnsonese’—the reader must go to Boswell. We see, in Macaulay’s words, ‘the gigantic body, the huge massy face, seamed with the scars of disease, the grey wig with the scorched foretop, the dirty hands, the nails bitten and pared to the quick. We see the eyes and mouth moving with convulsive twitches; we see the heavy form rolling; we hear it puffing; and then comes the “Why, sir!” and the “What then, sir?” and the “No, sir!” and the “You don’t see your way through the question, sir!”’ For Boswell’s doctor is immortal.

\* *A History of Criticism*. By Prof. G. Saintsbury, II, 488. Blackwood, 1901.

## CHAPTER XII

### BREAKING BOUNDS

‘This wonderful century! Its motto should be, Unhand me!’  
W. E. GLADSTONE

As wider circles of society became of importance to the State, a deeper interest was taken in their sayings and their doings. This is the simplest explanation of the rise of the English novel in the middle of the eighteenth century. The circle widened—the interest deepened—with the progress of time, and of all that time brought with it in democratic sentiment and popular enfranchisement. The centre of social gravity in the novels of Henry Fielding (1707–1754) was placed in the English middle classes, among the squirearchy and the clergy. Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), his slightly older contemporary, who was a tradesman by birth and breeding, achieved his remarkable successes by depicting what he consciously regarded as the life of the ‘higher-middle’ class. He touched the extreme of its virtue in the perfect knight—eighteenth century standard—who gave his name to the novel *Sir Charles Grandison*, and the extreme of its vice in Charles Lovelace, the ‘villain’ of *Clarissa Harlowe*.

It would be pleasant to dwell on the group—

or, rather, the isolated figures—of women novelists, whose rise began about this time. Frances Burney Madame D'Arblay (1752–1840), a distinguished member of a family whose memoirs add so much to the charm of literary London in eighteenth century records, was the first woman to attempt, in *Evelina* and other works, the domestic fiction of cultivated society. Maria Edgeworth (1769–1849), keen, capable, and clever; Jane Austen (1775–1817), with a subtle, sub-acid humour flavouring the tame fancy and shy observation of her *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*; Mrs Gaskell (1810–1865), author of *Cranford*, the tenderest study of a society composed chiefly of maiden ladies, and author, too, of a life of her more brilliant contemporary Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855); the Brontë sisters themselves—Emily, Charlotte, Ann—fiery, romantic spirits cabined in sickly frames, to whom English fiction owes several remarkable novels and, chiefly, Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*; 'George Eliot' Marian Cross (1819–1880), author of *Adam Bede*, *Daniel Deronda*, *Felix Holt*, *Silas Marner*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, *Romola*, and other studies of life and character—these are the greatest of the woman writers who for more than a hundred years—from the times of the Georges till nearly the close of the Victorian age—illuminated English literature with their cultivated wit, and thus incidentally raised the standard of English life, admitting the influence of women in the social changes of the times, and proving—since 1837—the intellectual capabilities of the sex which was represented on the Throne.



Sir Walter Scott, novelist and poet (1771-1832), enlarged the scope of the novel to include the national history, the folklore and traditions of his own country; William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) inherited and wore more gracefully the mantle of Fielding; Charles Dickens (1812-1870) sought his characters from a stratum of society below that of previous masters; and Charles Reade (1814-1884), Anthony Trollope (1815-1882), Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), belong to the same great circle. The enumeration need not be extended. Between 1749—the year of Fielding's *Tom Jones*—and 1849—the year of Dickens's *David Copperfield*—we have the busiest century in the history of English letters. Poets, essayists, historians come and go across the stage; but notably for our present purpose this period includes the rise and decline of the novel. Prior to 1749 the English novel hardly existed; since the successive deaths of the writers mentioned above, and since Mr Meredith (b. 1828) ceased to write, the main vein has been exhausted. 'The provision which we have here made', declared Fielding in his 'bill of fare' to *Tom Jones* (Bk. I, ch. 1), 'is no other than Human Nature'. Thousands of novels have been published since Fielding drew on this storehouse; a new language has been invented to suit the criticism of fiction, and 'realists' and 'idealists' dispute for the possession of the men from whose views of life and human nature the terminology took its start. The study of psychology, as a separate branch of science, which began in the nineteenth century, opened a new field for novelists, and even as early as Charlotte Brontë we

can trace in *Jane Eyre* the novel of character-development struggling with the earlier conventions of the novel of incident and adventure. But, briefly, we may say that with very few exceptions—Sir Walter Besant (1836–1901) among the dead, Mrs Humphry Ward among the living—the great age of the novel, which began in the middle of the eighteenth century, closed with George Meredith in the nineteenth.

The cause of its rise has been suggested above as the deeper interest aroused in the life and thought of the new circles which were coming into social prominence. Arkwright's burning mill may be cited as evidence that they did not come into prominence without difficulties and violence ; but, summarily, Sir Leslie Stephen correctly writes that, ' as the social changes in the eighteenth century give new influence to the middle classes and then to the democracy, the aristocratic class which represented the culture of the opening stage is gradually pushed aside ; its methods become antiquated, and its conventions cease to represent the ideals of the most vigorous part of the population ' \*. The cause of the decline of the novel need not detain us here, except, perhaps, to say that it is not to be sought in a contraction of the social circle. Not even a revolution could undo what was done by the French Revolution. The cause probably lies nearer, in a temporary exhaustion of the resources of the theme. Human Nature—Fielding's workshop—is inexhaustible, but the variations on the theme which the novel can treat, though almost infinite, have

\* *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 218.

limits. A sameness is inevitable at last, or, rather, the element of unexpectedness in the denouement is eliminated, and with its disappearance the *genre* tends to decay. Hence the decadent novel so familiar in recent years with its obvious straining after originality, whether in by-ways of adventure or in eccentricities of conduct. Perhaps the true explanation will be found in the fact that society is on the border of new changes which will provide fresh experience for human nature, and fresh material, accordingly, for romance. However this may be, it is too early at this point, in the dawn of the English novel, to discuss the causes of its decline. Here it is enough to note the sudden and ample use which Richardson, Fielding and their successors made of the new forces which were at work in their own day.

Fielding's appeal to human nature differed in all respects from the appeal to nature which we remarked in Pope. Pope's Nature was natural order—'the best for the best'—natural law—and man and his works fell, or were forced, into their places as parts of the regulated whole. In other words, Pope and his school—which included politicians as well as thinkers—started their observation *from without*. They observed the succession of occurrences, the orderly process of phenomena, and out of these various data of simple observation they induced a system of rules which they superimposed on the constitution of humanity. Human government and human morals—the sciences of economics, politics, and ethics—were required to conform (and the likelihood assisted

the conviction) with the incomplete schemes of physical science. The lines quoted in the last chapter from Pope's *Essay on Man* are pertinent to this point :

The bliss of Man (could pride that blessing find)  
Is not to act or think beyond mankind ;  
No powers of body or of soul to share,  
But what his nature and his state can bear

—a prescription which, if literally applied, would have stopped all human progress since the ' powers of body and soul ' were first developed from the ape. For if there may be no acting or thinking ' beyond mankind '—no higher man, in a word—there can have been no lower man : development and growth are inconceivable.

Why has not man a microscopic eye ?  
For this plain reason, man is not a fly.

But, by parity of plain reasoning, and even more forcibly, for man never was a fly, man should never have outgrown the faculties of his arboreal and quadrumanous ancestors. This, too, is the teaching of the *Moral Essays*, and this, at its best, is the spirit of Pope's *Universal Prayer*, where his philosophy, touched by emotion, rises to the perception that ' to enjoy is to obey '.

A different note is struck when observation starts *from within*, and when the external world is deliberately examined in its relation to (or, as coloured by) the thought and action of mankind. The Elizabethans used their eyes : they were everlastingly seeing and describing. The writers of the Augustan period used chiefly their reason : they employed the data of observation as

axioms for the conduct of life. But the life itself cried in contradiction. The discord between what should be and what was, between social 'law' and social practice, which reached its culminating expression in the French Revolution of 1789, was the incontrovertible reply to the formal fatalism of the reasoners. A new note was heard in English literature when imagination was added to observation, and thought, turned-in upon itself, began to view all nature and man from the aspect of the man himself—the unit in preference to the universe. No longer the order in nature—itsself very imperfectly observed—imposed its obligation on man: the French Revolution marked the extreme revolt from such a doctrine: but human sentiment—raised in places to an interpretative faculty seemingly 'beyond mankind'—declared and vindicated its right to revise the view of external nature. Romance—the intervention of the unexpected—resumed its forgotten part in life, and sentiment—immigrant from France, where Rousseau had raised it to a creed—opened fresh avenues of approach to the commonest facts of observation.

Romance and sentiment combined to produce the English novel in its various manifestations. And, dimly, at first, and with much unconscious hesitation, these twin handmaids of the intellectual imagination won their difficult way into other and higher streams of literary expression. Note, first, the diffusion of writing, which precisely corresponds to the new spring which was budding unknown to Fleet Street and its denizens. While Johnson, whose *Lives of the Poets* was completed



in 1781, was the autocrat of literary London, and exalted the claims of the classical school, the voice of the new movement, sometimes strong and sometimes faltering, was raised in all parts of England and Scotland. The novelists whom we named above, the poets whom we shall name below were not bred in the literary tradition. Richardson, it is true, was a printer and Fielding a lawyer in London; but Sir Walter Scott, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë—in her Yorkshire parsonage—these writers were not protected by a club and coffee-house convention from the breath of the fresh wind which was blowing through the land: from the light of a new sun rising on industry, politics, society, art, and—through Wesley—on religion.

One sign of the new movement is the choice of heroes of action outside the charmed circle of the great. There are two interesting passages in *The Art of English Poetry*, published anonymously in 1589, but doubtless correctly ascribed to a certain George Puttenham\*, which bear directly on this context. The first defines the boundaries, geographically speaking, of literary England:

Ye shall therefore take the usual speech of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London, within sixty miles, and not much above.

And the second defines the boundaries, morally speaking, of the society qualified for admittance to literature:

\* See *Documents Illustrating Elizabethan Poetry*. By Sir Philip Sidney, George Puttenham, and William Webbe. Routledge, 2s. 6d.

Now, because the actions of mean and base personages tend in very few cases to any great good example—for who pauseth to follow the steps and manner of life of a craftsman, shepherd or sailor, though he were his father or dearest friend ; yea, how almost is it possible that such manner of men should be of any virtue other than their profession requireth ?—therefore was nothing committed to history but matters of great and excellent persons and things.

Thus, in 1589, exactly two hundred years before the boundaries of society were convulsed by the French Revolution, a critic of no mean powers set the *milieu* of literature in ' great and excellent persons ' within a sixty-mile radius of London. Outside were the barbarians and outer darkness. The middle-class had but recently been added to the serious factors of social life, and the so-called lower classes were not definitely reckoned with as material for literature till after society had been democratized by the industrial revolutions at the close of the eighteenth century. But now consider the conditions two hundred years after George Puttenham. James Macpherson (1736–1796) had extended the sixty-mile radius to include his alleged translations but virtual inventions of the Gaelic works of Ossian ; Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) was preparing his three volumes of *Border Minstrelsy*, which were followed by his ballad-poems of Scotland—*The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, and *The Lady of the Lake*—and by the Waverley series of his historical romances ; Robert Burns (1759–1796) had poured out his heart in lyrics of love and liberty, and Thomas Gray (1716–1771), who resided within the radius, had extended the moral boundaries to include his *Elegy in a Country*

*Churchyard*, in which 'great and excellent persons' made way for the humble and obscure :

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure ;  
 Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
 The short and simple annals of the Poor. . . .

Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
 The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear :  
 Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast  
 The little tyrant of his fields withstood,  
 Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,  
 Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood. . . .

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife  
 Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray ;  
 Along the cool sequester'd vale of life  
 They kept the noiseless tenour of their way. . . .

Their names, their years, spelt by the unletter'd Muse,  
 The place of fame and elegy supply :  
 And many a holy text around she strews  
 That teach the rustic moralist to die.

These 'annals of the poor', this 'village-Hampden' and 'inglorious Milton', this 'rustic moralist' with his 'unletter'd Muse'—surely the lonely tombstone in a country churchyard cries its 'siste, viator' from one age to another, and arrests, in the melodious stanzas of Gray's *Elegy* (1751), the transition of English literature from Pope to Wordsworth.

We are dwelling with the giants ; let us descend a moment to the plains. Among those who supplied material to Scott for his collection of *Border Minstrelsy* was James Hogg (1770-1835), a shepherd of Ettrick, immortalized as 'the Ettrick shepherd' in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* of John Wilson

(1785-1854). Wilson, who contributed these papers to *Blackwood's Magazine* between 1822 and 1825—a long way on in the new century, but not too far for our purpose—took his own part in the conversations which the *Noctes* convey as 'Christopher North'; and we may select from No. xi a striking illustration\* of the revolt from the obsolete convention which Puttenham laid down as to the limitations of literature to 'great and excellent persons':

*North.* James, I'll tell you a kind of composition that would tell.

*Shepherd.* What is't, man? Let's hear't.

*North.* Pastoral Dramatic Poetry, partly prose and partly verse—like the *Winter's Tale*, or, *As You Like It*, or *The Tempest*, or *The Midsummer's-Night's Dream*.

*Shepherd.* Let's see a tale o' your ain, sir.

*Tickler.* James, would you seriously have North to write dramas about the loves of the lower orders—men in corduroy breeches, and women in linsey-woollen petticoats—

*Shepherd.* Wha are ye, sir, to speak o' the lower orders? Look up to the sky, sir, on a starry nicht, and puir, ignorant, thochtless, upsettin' cretur you'll be, gin you dinna feel far within and deep down your ain sowl, that you air, in good truth, ane o' the lower orders—no perhaps o' men, but o' intelligences! and that it requires some dreadfu' mystery far beyond your comprehension to mak you worthy o' ever in after life becoming a dweller among those celestial mansions. Yet think ye, sir, that thousan's and tens o' thousan's o' millions, since the time when first God's wrath smote the earth's soil with the curse o' barrenness, and human creatures had to earn their bread wi' sweat and dust, haena lived and toiled, and laughed and sighed, and groaned and great, o' the lower orders, that are noo in eternal bliss, and shall sit above you and Mr North, and ithers o' the best o' the clan, in the realms o' heaven!

*Tickler.* James, you affect me, but less by the pictures

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\* *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. New Universal Library, pp. 136-37.

you draw, than by the suspicion—nay, more than the suspicion—you intimate that I am insensible to these things——

*Shepherd.* I refer to you, Mr North, if he didna mean, by what he said about corduroy breeks an linsey-woollen petticoats, to throw ridicule on all that wore them, and to assert that nae men o' genius, like you or me, ought to regard them as worthy o' being caractereezed in prose or rhyme?

*North.* My dear James, you have put the argument on an immovable basis. Poor, lonely, humble people, who live in shielings, and huts, and cottages and farm-houses, have souls worthy of being saved, and therefore not unworthy of being written about by such authors as have also souls to be saved; among whom you and I and Tickler himself——

*Shepherd.* Yes, yes—Tickler himself, sure eneuch. Gie's your haun, Mr Tickler, gie's your haun—we're baith in the right; for I agree wi' you, that nae hero o' tragedy or a Yepic should be brought forrit ostentatiously in corduroy breeks, and that, I suppose, is a' you intended to say.

! Literature had travelled far from the haunts of the Elizabethan muses when 'corduroy breeches and linsey woollen petticoats' were admitted to its freedom by the native voice of a Scottish shepherd. Between Johnson who died in 1784 and Wilson who was born in 1785 how full a stream there flows of industrial awakening and democratic sentiment.

There was jetsam on the stream. Take the story of Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770), the

marvellous boy,  
The sleepless soul that perish'd in its pride,

as the greater poet, William Wordsworth, called him; read it with the sympathetic knowledge that Wordsworth himself was born in the year that Chatterton died—a suicide at less than eighteen—,



and something of his heart-sore yearning for the Spring, which he was too poor and too hungry to await, speaks to us still from the poems which he composed after the models of fifteenth century romantic ballads :

The gathered storm is ripe; the big drops fall,  
The sun-burnt meadows smoke, and drink the rain ;  
The coming ghastness do the cattle pall,  
And the full flocks are driving o'er the plain ;  
Dashed from the clouds, the waters fly again ;  
The welkin opes ; the yellow lightning flies,  
And the hot fiery steam in the wide lowings dies.

This note is new in English poetry—this intermediary note between nature and man ; and new, too, is the conclusion to this *Excelente Balade of Charitie* \* :

Virgin and holy saint, who sit in gloure,  
Or give the mighty will, or give the good man power.†

Ringing, too, with a new pathos is the ' Minstrel's Song ' in Chatterton's *Ælla*, from which three verses may be cited † :

Oh ! sing unto my roundelay ;  
Oh ! drop the briny tear with me ;  
Dance no more at holiday ;  
Like a running river be.  
My love is dead,  
Gone to his death-bed,  
All under the willow-tree.  
Sweet his tongue as the throstle's note  
Quick in dance as thought can be,  
Deft his tabour, cudgel stout ;  
Oh ! he lies by the willow-tree.  
My love, etc.

\* *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton*. Edited by H. D. Roberts. (Muses' Library, 2 vols, 1s. net each). II, 85, 87.

† *Ibid*, 53.

See! the white moon shines on high,  
 Whiter is my true love's shroud,  
 Whiter than the morning sky,  
 Whiter than the evening cloud.  
 My love, etc.

Another poet who 'threw forward' is James Thomson (1700-1748), author of *The Seasons*, author, too, of the notorious line—which he subsequently altered—

Oh! Sophonisba, Sophonisba, oh!

and author of one of the most famous, though not of the greatest, of English poems, 'Rule Britannia!' Thomson was a Scotsman by birth, the son of a Scottish minister, and though, like his fellow-countryman, Tobias Smollett (1721-1771), the compiler of a *History of England* and the author of *Roderick Random* and other novels of a coarse and 'picaresque' type, he sought his fortune in London, the experiment was hardly to his advantage. Success and prosperity did not improve his gifts, and his earlier writings are acknowledged to be his best. Among these is *The Castle of Indolence*, 'writ in the manner of Spenser', and recalling not merely by its form but likewise by its contents the tradition of Spenserian romance. Moreover, if it looked back to Spenser, it also looked forward to Wordsworth, who sagely excepted Thomson from his attack on eighteenth century poetry: 'it is a work of inspiration', wrote Wordsworth of *The Seasons*; and of *The Castle of Indolence* he added that its verse was even 'more harmonious and its diction more pure'. Let us take the thirtieth stanza of the first Canto of this poem,

and we remark at once a note familiar enough now, but wholly unfamiliar to the generation to which Thomson belonged :

As when a shepherd of the Hebrid Isles,  
Placed far amid the melancholy main  
(Whether it be lone fancy him beguiles,  
Or that aerial beings sometimes deign  
To stand, embodied, to our senses plain)  
Sees on the naked hill, or valley low,  
The whilst on ocean Phœbus dips his wain,  
A vast assembly moving to and fro ;  
Then, all at once, in air dissolves the wondrous show .

It was not till seventy years afterwards that Wordsworth's cuckoo was heard

Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides,

or that Keats in *The Eve of St Agnes* wrote Spenserian stanzas in like or more melting verse. For the voice of Thomson in 1730 anticipates the surer melodies of the great poets of ' the Romantic revival '. Or take the following passages from *Spring*, the first of the four *Seasons* :

Oh come ! and while the rosy-footed May  
Steals blushing on, together let us tread  
The morning dews, and gather in their prime  
Fresh-blooming flowers, to grace thy braided hair  
And thy loved bosom that improves their sweets.

489-493.

Fair-handed Spring unbosoms every grace :  
Throws out the snowdrop and the crocus first,  
The daisy, primrose, violet darkly-blue,  
And polyanthus of unnumbered dyes,  
The yellow wall-flower, stained with iron brown,  
And lavish stock that scents the garden round.

529-534.

Every copse

Deep tangled, tree irregular, and bush  
 Bending with dewy moisture, o'er the heads  
 Of the coy choristers that lodge within,  
 Are prodigal of harmony. . . .  
 The blackbird whistles from the thorny brake ;  
 The mellow bullfinch answers from the grove. . . .  
 'Tis love creates their melody, and all  
 This waste of music is the voice of love.

594-598 ; 604-5 ; 614-5.

In these green days

Reviving sickness lifts her languid head ;  
 Life flows afresh ; and young-eyed health exalts  
 The whole creation round. Contentment walks  
 The sunny glade, and feels an inward bliss  
 Spring o'er his mind, beyond the power of kings  
 To purchase\*. Pure serenity apace  
 Induces thought, and contemplation still.  
 By swift degress the love of nature works,  
 And warms the bosom ; till at last, sublimed  
 To rapture and enthusiastic heat,  
 We feel the present Deity, and taste  
 The joy of God to see a happy world

891-903.

It is tempting to continue these quotations from the poem of 1728 which inspired so much of the best poetry of the century's end and of the next century. But we must stop to point out what the reader will probably have observed : first, the new approach to nature, the direct study of her aspects, and the attempt to decipher her meaning ; secondly, the newly-fashioned epithets—' fresh-blooming ', ' fair-handed ', ' deep-tangled ',

\* Compare Shelley's *Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples* :

. . . That content surpassing wealth  
 The sage in meditation found.

Thomson's influence on the poetry of seventy or eighty years later is hardly yet properly appreciated.

'young-eyed', 'green days'—so different from the conventional diction of the classical school; and, thirdly, the return to blank verse, with a conscious Miltonian cadence, in preference to the heroic couplet which Thomson's contemporaries were united in employing.

Lastly, reference may be made to a dull poem in blank verse of about 3,400 lines which Thomson composed under the title of *Liberty*. It is noteworthy, not for its poetic merits, but for the spirit of large patriotism which it breathes, extending—as, perhaps, is appropriate to the author of 'Rule Britannia'—the scope of patriotic aspiration:

See, social labour lifts his guarded head,  
And men not yield to government in vain.  
    . . . Beauteous order reigns,  
Manly submission, unimposing toil,  
Trade without guile, civility that marks  
From the foul herd of brutal slaves, thy sons,  
And fearless peace . . . .  
The winds and seas are Britain's wide domain.  
Lo! swarming southward on rejoicing suns  
Gay colonies extend; the calm retreat  
Of undeserved distress, the better home  
Of those whom bigots chase from foreign lands.  
Not built on rapine, servitude, and woe,  
And in their turn some petty tyrant's prey,  
But, bound by social freedom, firm they rise.

Since Edward III invited Flemings to teach English manufacturers how to weave, since Queen Elizabeth's captains adventured in unknown seas, this poetic motive had been latent in the development of our industry and empire. It was never again to be let go. The liberty of 'social labour' and the bond of 'social freedom' have entered English poetry for the first time.

There are other characteristics of James Thom-



son on which it would be interesting to dwell, and which we find repeated in several contemporary writers. There was the fondness for Latin (or Latinistic) phraseology, which belonged to his age :

See, where the winding vale its lavish stores,  
*Irriguous*, spreads. See, how the lily drinks  
 The *latent* rill, scarce oozing through the grass,  
 Of growth *luxuriant* ; as the *humid* bank,  
 In fair *profusion*, decks.

' Spring ' : 494-98

is a typical example, and, among countless other instances, we may select 'his *void* embrace', '*diffusive* tremble', '*invest* the fields', '*numerous* bleat', '*serenes* the sky', 'to *meditate* the blue *profound*', '*instant* emerge', '*obedient* wave', '*effuses* round', 'the swift *illapse*', between lines 1214 and 1262 of 'Summer' in *The Seasons*. More striking—and equally of his age—was the seemingly simple Deism, which really corresponded to a highly sophisticated argument from the easy circumstances of the poet's life. As Becky Sharp, in a well-known passage in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, reflected that 'it isn't difficult to be a country gentleman's wife. I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year', so the amiable, well-placed philosophers of the eighteenth century accepted without demur the dominion of God in His works. They discovered no discrepancy between his necessary benevolence and the lines of pleasantness in which they moved. Edward Young (1683-1765), author of *Night Thoughts* ('in Life, Death, and Immortality')—a philosophic poem in blank verse, published in

1742, which has enjoyed considerable success—satirized this tendency in various writings, and especially in his satires proper, first issued in folio under the title of *The Universal Passion* ('Love of Fame'). Dr Johnson truly says of Young, 'he was a man of genius and a poet', and we may quote the following passage in illustration of our present context :

From atheists far, they steadfastly believe,  
God is, and is Almighty—to forgive.  
His other excellence they'll not dispute ;  
But mercy, sure, is His chief attribute. . . .  
No : He's for ever in a smiling mood,  
He's like themselves ; or how could He be good ?  
And they blaspheme, who blacker schemes suppose.  
Devoutly thus Jehovah they depose,  
The pure, the just, and set up in his stead  
A Deity that's perfectly well-bred.

The well-bred Deity of eighteenth century rationalism, though he recurs in such a work as *The Pleasures of Imagination* by Mark Akenside (1721-1770), had to meet the serious opposition of such philosophers as Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753), whose *Treatise concerning Human Knowledge* and other writings against materialism do not enter into the scope of this volume. He had further to withstand the savage irony of Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin (1667-1745.) whose social satire on government and manners was conveyed by *Gulliver's Travels*, whose *Journal to Stella* (Esther Johnson) contains the intimate gossip of a true lover and a busy politician, and whose hate of theological shams is the motive of his *Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. Of far more permanent interest than these negative

writings, however, is the positive witness for revealed, as opposed to natural, religion borne by the hymn-writers of the age. They join the definite precursors of 'the Romantic revival' in their instinctive, courageous desire to give passionate expression to the *emotions* of their fellow-men. They sought their inspiration in joyous and suffering humanity, whose hearts, accordingly, they touched. The lyrical note in poetry, which was revived at this time, is indissolubly associated with the feelings of joy and grief, with the emotions of love and hate, occurring in common works and days; and, as the commonalty itself developed, however crudely, and despite whatever discouragement from the circle of aristocratic men of letters, a sense of its own birthright, so this note crept more and more into the utterances of poets and novelists, and gradually enlarged and transformed the conception of the poet's craft. Hymnology belongs so much to the history of English religion, rather than of English literature, that we do not pause to examine the contribution of the hymn-writers to the transition of the age. It must suffice to recall the honoured names of Isaac Watts (1674-1748), author of 'Our God, our help in ages past' and other accepted hymns, and of the Wesleys—John and Charles—sons of the Rev. Samuel Wesley, in connexion with this spiritual awakening which corresponded so closely to the industrial and social unrest expressed in other directions.

It may, perhaps, appear incongruous that the first name in this chapter should be that of Henry Fielding and that the last should be Wesley's. But to the reader gifted with imagination—and

without that appeal history is written in vain—the seeming incongruity disappears. Though Fielding was coarse and full-blooded, though many passages in his novels are unsuited to modern taste, yet he has an affinity with the hymn-writers and religious revivalists, not merely as a contemporary but as a worker on parallel lines, though in a different sphere. The sense of man's responsibility to himself is, at bottom, but another mode of stating the sense of man's responsibility to his Maker ; and, somewhat as ' in a glass, darkly ', but still with a keen desire to see clearly through the mists, writers in every class were moved by a common ambition to re-establish for the generation in which they lived, the relations between the Unknown and the known. The novelists investigated human character, seeking for the springs of action—the moral foundation of the world—in ever-widening circles of social intercourse and interests. The poets investigated nature, reading the signs impressed on the scenery around them in the mutation of the seasons, and trying to discover in those signs a soul-satisfying message from things permanent to things transitory ; and while newspapers multiplied and means of communication increased, while the flame of culture was communicated from one part of England to another, and was fanned by the breeze of discontent with existing institutions and customs, one characteristic is most prominent. Men began to *feel* again. There was little sickly sentimentalism, little of the exaggerated sentiment which had arisen in France ; rather there was a stubborn persistence in the ' John Bull ' type of coarse exterior. But, beneath this, a nation's



heart was stirring, as nature stirs in April, when the first flush is on the woods. Men began to think about their neighbours, and not merely about their equals in rank, thus adding charity to convention. The obligations of duty were extended to include the various claims which had grown up in the last hundred years. The dreams which the fathers had dreamed were living problems to the sons, and exacted the service of strong hands and willing hearts. Further, they demanded united service ; a communal idea was engendered which was of the utmost value in linking the classes together and in linking the home-keeping Englishman to his brother across the seas. Class-selfishness there was still : in a sense, it was keener than before because the recognition and distinction of class-interests could no longer be postponed ; but the mutual exclusiveness of classes was never to be revived in its old and uncompromising form. Human sensibilities were touched to sympathies unperceived before. In all this there was room for great literature along many lines of expression, and not the least interesting observations on the spirit of the age will be found in the ' Letters from a Citizen of the World to his Friends in the East ' (1762), commonly known as *The Citizen of the World*, by Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), the graceful author of the domestic novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* and of the comedies *She stoops to Conquer* and *The Good-natured Man*. But, wherever the evidence be sought, the conclusion is clear, that out of the era of settlement which William and Mary inaugurated there was developed a more thoughtful and a more earnest England, with most of its growing-pains



still before it, but already dowered with the high capacity of feeling. Gray's invocation 'To Adversity' might stand to typify, in one sense, the aspirations —hardly conscious—of the age:

The generous spark extinct revive,  
Teach me to love and to forgive,  
Exact my own defects to scan,  
*What others are to feel, and know myself a man.*

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE OPENING CASEMENTS

' The tide of passion, when strong, overflows and gradually insinuates itself into all nooks and corners of the mind. The springs of pure feeling will rise and fill the moulds of fancy that are fit to receive it '.

WILLIAM HAZLITT

THE recognition of feeling as a factor in literature brought us back by another road at the end of last chapter to the name of Thomas Gray (1706-1771), whose ethical and elegiac muse we had already had occasion to note. With feeling and its manifestation as a mode of approach to truth we shall be concerned throughout this chapter, and, in a sense, till the end of this book. For we have reached a stage in the glorious story of English literature at which we may fitly pause to look before and after. Literature has struck a note in Gray, Thomson, and their contemporaries which we shall hear reverberate for the remaining period of the story, and out of whose deeper tones we construct whatever material of joy, hope and consolation life derives from letters. We have reached modern literature, in a word, and, keeping steadily in view the sense of a development and progress in the nation's affairs, by which its artistic outlook has been modified and enlarged, we must discover

at this point (in consonance with the aim we are pursuing) what is new in the message, what has been added to its content by the last of its successive phases, and with the expectation of what delight and of what intellectual enlightenment—*how*, briefly—it should be read.

Something was said in the last chapter about the wider range of interest which distinguished men of letters at this date. We mentioned Fielding's delineation of the manners of the middle-classes ; we remarked in Gray his recourse to the 'annals of the poor' ; we noted from Goldsmith the broad sympathies of his 'citizen of the world'. But this in itself is not novel ; not sufficiently novel at least to constitute a fresh departure. Chaucer, accompanying his pilgrims from London to Canterbury, displayed no lack of appreciation for what the late Sir Walter Besant (1836-1901), in the height of Victorian humanitarianism, called, as the title of a once-famous story, 'all sorts and conditions of men :

Bifel that, in that seson on a day,  
In Southwerk at the Tabard, as I lay  
Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage  
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,  
At night was come in-to that hostelrye  
Wel nyne and twenty in a companye,  
Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle  
In felowshipe, and pilgrims were they alle . . .  
But natheles, whyl I have tyme and space,  
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,  
Me thinketh it acordaunt to resoun,  
To telle yow al the condicioun  
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,  
And whiche they weren, and of what degree.

*The Prologue.* 19-26, 35-40.

Lord Bacon, devising precepts for travellers, betrayed no imperfect sense of the uses of wide culture :

The things to be seen and observed are the courts of princes, specially when they give audience to ambassadors ; the courts of justice, when they sit and hear causes ; and so of consistories ecclesiastic ; the churches and monasteries, with the monuments which are therein extant, the walls and fortifications of cities and towns, and so the havens and harbours ; antiquities and ruins ; libraries ; colleges, disputations and lectures, where any are ; shipping and navies ; houses and gardens of State and pleasure, near great cities ; armories, arsenals, magazines ; exchanges, burses ; warehouses ; exercises of horsemanship, fencing, training of soldiers, and the like ; comedies, whereunto the better sorts of persons do resort ; treasuries of jewels and robes ; cabinets and rarities ; and, to conclude, whatsoever is memorable in the places where they go. . . . As for triumphs, masks, feasts, weddings, funerals, capital executions, and such shows, men need not to be put in mind of them : yet are they not to be neglected.

*Of Travel.*

And Shakespeare, in countless characters from Cleopatra to Caliban, supplied the eager curiosity of his age with studies of types of humanity.

It is true that the Augustan writers did not affect these pastures. There was, if not something new, at least the renewal of something disused in Fielding's declaration (*Tom Jones*, ch. I), 'The provision which we have here made is no other than Human Nature' ; and to this extent the critics are right in speaking of 'the Romantic revival' or—in Mr Watts-Dunton's phrase—of 'the *Renaissance* of wonder'. It was a revival and a re-birth in relation to Pope and his school—a reversion to the standards of Spenser in romance, of Milton, Shakespeare, Chaucer in human interest and direct-

ness. Appropriately, too, it was an age of intelligent editing of older writers. Lewis Theobald (1688-1744), whose fame was injured for many years—perhaps almost indelibly—by the bitter hostility of Pope who made him the hero of *The Dunciad*, has a front place in the rank of inspired Shakespearean editors ; and, without multiplying evidence of the return to nature, we may concede at once that the writers who broke away from Pope were breaking back to older models.

But this is not the whole of the matter. It is not conceivable that the generation after Pope should be content merely to return to the standards and traditions of the generation preceding him, and not wear their rue with a difference.

How simple, to these cates compared,  
Was that crude apple that diverted Eve !

So wrote Milton in *Paradise Regained* ; and when the magic casements of imagination were thrown open again to a people which had used no other light save the dry light of reason, it was a new Eden which was revealed. There is a significant passage in an early number of *The Spectator* which may help us at this point. Addison, writing on August 4, 1711, refers to the miserable practice of docking some of our words till they lose all but their first syllable, and mentions ‘ *mob* ’ for ‘ *mobile* ’ as an instance of the abuse. The mob asserted itself during the next hundred years ; it became a familiar term whether used by itself or in combination, as ‘ *mob-rule* ’, ‘ *mob-law* ’, and so forth, and not the most pedantic purist in language to-day could support Addison in excluding this



word from literary usage. The word 'idiot', again, which as late as Jeremy Taylor was employed in its literal sense of a man in private life, acquired its secondary meaning when a certain degree of participation in public affairs became a duty incumbent on every citizen, which he who shirked was an 'idiot'. 'Boor', again, and 'hind', 'menial', 'varlet', and 'churl' bear witness in their degradation to the growth of respect for the liberty of 'the subject, and to the progress of manufacture over agriculture. For England was changing in these years—in the prolonged century which stretched between the Revolution of 1688 and the Reform Act of 1832—was changing past recognition. The conditions of life were modified by the application of science to industry, by successive acts of emancipation of the middle and the lower classes, by tedious wars waged afar for the consolidation of the Empire, by the sentiment of reciprocal duty between 'the Haves' and 'the Have-nots', the employers and the employed, and by the mere force of all these circumstances acting in combination, and moulding the mass to shape and use.

Style was imposed upon the material, in the sense of a higher degree of artistic refinement, as the threads of order and design were discerned in nature and life. A certain *naïveté* in writing tended gradually to disappear. The qualities essential to good style of selection and combination were developed at this time. Drama had always possessed them, owing to the very simple cause that if the selection and arrangement of the material at the dramatist's disposal were not appropriate (and

therefore artistic), the inartistic portions would be hissed off the stage. Shakespeare's supreme instinct in style is due partly to his readiness as actor-manager to eliminate what was superfluous. Later, too, the Augustan poets who employed the heroic couplet were affected by the influence of the metre which they cultivated. Their minds invented the metre, and the metre reacted on their minds. It exacted almost of its own accord a tact in choice and composition, rejecting the languorous meanderings of *The Faery Queen*, for example. Style in prose, on the other hand, was less directly affected by such mechanical aids. Here the writer was left to depend more entirely on his own taste for the principles of selection and combination, and nothing illustrates more notably the dominance of order in life than the growth of English prose-style. The older writers, however eloquent, seemed unable fully to grasp the matter they were inditing. They deviated and wandered; they were discursive, elliptical, incoherent. They failed to modulate their pitch, and lacked a sense of proportion and restraint in marshalling their ideas. Through Steele, Addison, Goldsmith, we watch the concentration of purpose, which was largely assisted by the gradual emergence of a definite literary clique, so that writers for reviews and newspapers and members of special clubs had, as it were, their audience in their eye, and were enabled to select and combine the material at their disposal with an instinct hardly less sure than that of the dramatists and 'heroic' verse-men. This faculty culminated in Charles Lamb (1775-1834), who possessed in an

extraordinary degree the art of the essay, which requires above all a power of scrupulous selection and of rejection of the inappropriate. Even more notable, perhaps, is the rise of historians, of the calibre, for example, of Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which exhibits the qualities of prose-style in their highest perfection. It is long, and yet it is single, in conception, scope and execution. Gibbon kept clearly in view the unity harmonizing the design. The result is a composite whole, faithful in all its parts to the unifying idea, as all the members of the body—the supreme achievement of art—are faithful to the brain. The way is marked for such historians as Lord Macaulay (1800-1859), and for the science of history which was developed out of the work of the fabulists and annalists of an earlier and less coherent artistry.

This perfecting of prose-style corresponded very closely with the growth of the process in the nation which can best be described as 'finding itself'. The nation, too, became one people—one throughout its diversities of race, climate, and class—and it learned by painful degrees to select and combine its experience in such a manner as to produce an harmonious pattern for its own guidance in affairs. This faculty bestows just government, right conduct, and fine art, according to our several necessities. None of these came at once, and none of them came in full: but because the gifts of art are less subject to abuse and mischance than those of government and conduct, because they are more tenacious of the ideal inasmuch as they are less exposed to the difficulties

of realization—for they belong more securely to the abstract world where hunger and pain and greed do not tempt their votaries to apostasy—therefore the artistic revelation of human perfectibility has drawn nearer to the goal than the revelation by government or conduct. Our art is purer than our laws, our laws are purer than our action. The farther the *milieu* of circumstance in which our principles are displayed is removed from actuality, the higher our standard is raised. The highest of all standards is held up by the poets of the nineteenth century. If we could live by their precepts, if—forestalling their precepts—we could see with their vision and feel with their emotions and interpret with their imagination, our laws would not fall short of just government nor our acts of right conduct.

Thus, what is new in English literature at the end of the eighteenth century is, as ever, the new note which was derived from life—reflecting experience, and reacting upon it. The single principle of design, made manifest through all diversities of nature and experience—this conception, when once fully grasped, or even imperfectly adumbrated, availed to brace human thought in its several modes of expression. It was expressed in government by laws tending gradually to the greatest degree of liberty and justice compatible with the safety of society. It was expressed in social intercourse by the demolition of class-barriers, abolishing slavery and serfdom in their various grades of restrictive and exclusive operation. It was expressed in art and letters—and in poetry, above all—by an instinctive, hardly-con-



scious effort to get behind the conventions of conduct, the appearances of experience, and the shams of daily morality to an apprehension, however dim, of the shy and hidden soul of truth by whose light we see the light.

This is a difficult saying, and must be felt rather than explained, but some slight help may be given by a very simple demonstration. The tool of literature is language ; it is by the use of words that the message of literature is expressed. But words in themselves are very feeble weapons, and do not travel far. ' Table ', for instance, is a word which does not carry its meaning beyond the English-speaking peoples. The object presented to sight and touch which an Englishman calls ' table ' a German calls ' Tisch ', and neither combination of letters—' T-i-s-c-h ' or ' t-a-b-l-e ', neither sound of either combination—has the remotest significance apart from the implicit consent of Englishmen to associate a certain idea with the use of the one and of Germans to associate the same idea with the use of the other. Sometimes the same combination of letters conveys disparate ideas to different people. Write ' p-a-i-n ' on a piece of paper, and show it to a man at Dover, and he will associate the word with a sensation the reverse of joy. Cross twenty miles of water, and show the same symbol to a resident at Calais, and he will offer you bread. Moreover, conceding an agreement as to the employment of these sounds, which alone can make language possible, there is still the objection that a table is only a table if we see and feel it to be one. If it yielded at a touch, like wine or water in a glass, we should deny that



it possessed the quality of resistance : if, by blindness or an optical delusion, we failed to see it, we should deny that it possessed the quality of visibility. Accordingly, the Englishman's ' table ' and the German's ' Tisch ' is a mere convention of experience, resting, first, on the consent—terminable by a change of language—to give that name to that object, and, secondly, on qualities in the object perceptible to the senses of those who name it. If it conform to these temporal and variable conditions it may be taken to represent the idea to which the name is given by the consent of Englishmen and Germans. To a blind and paralytic Russian, who could neither see nor feel the object, and to whom the sounds ' Tisch ' and ' table ' would convey no intelligible idea at all, the statement ' this is a table ' would be relatively untrue.

Truth, then, in human experience, is relative and conditional ; no absolute truth can be affirmed of any object presented to the five senses of man. At the best, if the senses agree as to the form and substance of the object, it only represents an idea without substance or form abstracted from experience. No one of the countless tables which we can see and feel corresponds to the table-idea after which they are called. The absolute, abstract table—not specifically mine or yours, or oaken or ash, or for writing or for dining—is laid up in the world of ideas. And yet, of course, it is the true table : the rest are only relatively true.

Now, this search for truth and beauty—twin aspects of the good—behind the shams and the symbols, the pretences and conventions of experience, was the aim of thought in England at the end

of the eighteenth century. It was a thoroughly practical aim. Englishmen did not run about seeking for abstract tables in conventional mahogany-fitted dining-parlours. That is not the Englishman's way. But in their laws and conduct, in their aims and aspirations, they did, nevertheless—whether consciously or not, is no matter—seek a higher revelation, and a closer approximation to the higher truth revealed. Their search affected the table (which need figure no longer in our argument) by superior critical construction; the improvements in furniture and architecture, which belong to the history of the nineteenth century, are directly traceable to the desire that the forms of line and curve should express the truth and beauty of those forms laid up in the abstract world. Painters, again, who use colour for the expression of ideas, were moved by a like desire to make their instrument tell the truth, and J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), who went back, as did the poets, to the methods of old masters, effected a revolution in this respect, which was forced on the conviction of his countrymen mainly by the efforts of John Ruskin\* (1819–1900). Edmund Burke (1729–1797) represented in his speeches a practical aspect of this tendency, and brought into political life, which engaged his later years, the fine spirit of idealism, which was the motive, before he was twenty-seven, of his *Vindication of Natural Society* and his treatise *On the Sublime and Beautiful*. It is significant, too, that as late as 1772 he

\* See *Modern Painters*, 5 vols. New Universal Library, 5s. net.

was attacked under the false supposition that he had written the anonymous *Letters of Junius*—probably by Sir Philip Francis—in which moderate principles were vehemently expressed.

Accompanying, and intimately bound up with, the search for truth behind experience, and for beauty of design beyond the conventions of form, there went a tendency to simplicity. To abandon the artificialities of city life, and to seek in the bosom of nature the peace of her woods and fields seemed to many enthusiasts of this age the solution of the problem; and this impulse was assisted by the teachings of Rousseau in France whose *Émile*, for example, a treatise on education, was given a moral direction in *Sandford and Merton*, once a universally-read book, by the social reformer Thomas Day (1748–1789). It is not within the scope of this volume to trace the influence of the new humanism in its varied manifestations in English public and private life. Our immediate object is to learn how to read English literature, and the new literature now rising cannot be read with full intelligence without taking into account the general tendency hinted at above. For it is this metaphysical note—this desire to transcend mere facts, and to see deeper than the physical universe—which distinguished, in a growing degree, the pure literature of the century still before us. Burning dimly in Thomson and Gray, in Collins and Cowper, shining with a dry light in Crabbe—the pessimist among the sentimentalist—, it leaped at the fires of the French Revolution, and flared to a flame in Shelley and Keats. Wordsworth bore it as a torch, to give light rather than receive it,

and we shall see it held aloft, irradiating the dark of thought, in the succeeding poetry of the age.

The 'revival' was really a new birth, because poets, at their return to the old masters, brought with them the accumulated wealth of fresh national adventure. They brought with them the deposit of imperial enterprise, striking at the roots of the conceptions of trade, commerce, and colonies, and of patriotism itself. They brought with them the deposit of physical science, modifying and enlarging their knowledge of God's purpose in the universe. They brought with them the deposit of social and economic advance, changing the empire reared by Athens on a basis of slave-labour to an empire in which the slaves were admitted to the privileges of the free, and revising accordingly the older ideas of justice, liberty, and equality, with inevitable effects on the civilized arts. To this fresh material of literature—this accretion amalgamated with the old—the writers of the new generation applied the methods of the old masters. They gave reins to their fancy and their imagination. They loosed the restricting dams of metre and diction, of 'propriety' and convention in thought and style, aiming beyond the names of things, at the things—and the ideas of things—which names serve to symbolize. And where plain language was too precise—too much the servant of the fact—to express the insurgent thought, they borrowed figurative language from the spiritual world across the borderland of human knowledge. Sometimes, when fancy played lightly on the frontiers of that world, they would wreath their expression into fantastic shapes of beckoning

fairies and mocking elves ; at other times, when imagination, undeterred, plunged deeper and deeper into the forest of enchantment, or climbed higher and higher up the cloud-capped mount, leaving a faint far light to mark the pathway of ascent, the expression of the seer would be wrought in difficult modes, compelling the faith of his readers as a condition precedent of initiation. And sometimes, and how delightfully !, imagination and fancy would be joined with masterly expression, and a new language would be created for the needs of transcendental thought, a new medium of communication between the Unseen and the seen, till the seer and the vision would shine in the same light and knowledge and faith would mingle their revelation.

All this came later and by degrees, and will be illustrated in its proper place. Here and now we may go back to the beginning of the Romantic revival, with a clearer apprehension of the ideal of which it was a handmaid, among the handmaids of the world's progress. Here and now we have to note, in the happy phrase of Mr William Watson, an elegaic poet of our own days, how

From dewy pastures, uplands sweet with thyme,  
A virgin breeze freshened the jaded day.  
It wafted Collins' lonely vesper-chime,  
It breathed abroad the frugal note of Gray.

This junction of Thomas Gray (1716-1771) and William Collins (1721-1759) in a single review is a commonplace of criticism. Dr Johnson wrote a life of each, and William Hazlitt (1778-1830),



an early critic, in his *Lectures on English Poets*, declaring of Collins that he 'is the only one of the minor poets of whom, if he had lived, it cannot be said that he might not have done the greatest things', adds: 'I should conceive that Collins had a much greater poetical genius than Gray'. Hazlitt's opinion is valuable, and deserves to be remembered; but comparative degrees of genius must be settled by knowledge at first-hand, and—as the great names multiply of English men of letters—such first-hand knowledge grows more difficult to direct. We must be satisfied to remark, for the sake of comparison, that Collins died at thirty-eight and Gray lived to be fifty-five; that Collins was the son of a tradesman and became imbecile in the later years of his short life, thus missing at both ends of his brief, brilliant career the advantages bestowed on Gray, who was educated at Eton and Cambridge, travelled with Horace Walpole, declined the honour of the poet-laureateship, and enjoyed a reputation as a scholar which is a little too big for the trouble which he took to sustain it. For the rest, we remark of both alike the radiant freshness of their writing. Both alike demanded a more elastic material than had satisfied the tamer requirements of some of their predecessors. The ode, so-called 'Pindaric', from its irregularity of metre, owing to an imperfect understanding of the prosody of Pindar, the pre-historic Greek poet, is common to both, and produced harmonies more exquisite, because less rhetorical, than Dryden's; and other simpler lyric metres were re-discovered or invented. The fairies came back to English hedgerows, and imagination

populated the lanes which Pope had excluded from his survey.

Take, for instance—for, as the wealth accumulates, its samples must be taken on trust—the repeated appeal of Collins to the greater wits of the past :

O thou, whose spirit most possess'd  
The sacred seat of Shakespeare's breast !  
By all that from thy prophet broke,  
In thy divine emotions spoke ;  
Hither again thy fury deal,  
*Teach me but once like him to feel !*

*Ode to Fear.*

High on some cliff, to heaven up-piled,  
Of rude access, of prospect wild,  
Where, tangled round the jealous steep,  
Strange shades o'erbrow the valleys deep,  
And holy Genii guard the rock,  
Its glooms embrown, its springs unlock,  
While on its rich ambitious head,  
An Eden, like his own, lies spread :  
I view that oak, the fancied glades among,  
By which as Milton lay, his evening ear,  
From many a cloud that dropp'd ethereal dew,  
Nigh spher'd in heaven, its native strains could hear,  
On which that ancient trump he reach'd was hung.  
*My trembling feet his guiding steps pursue ;*

*In vain—Such bliss to one alone,  
Of all the sons of soul, was known.*

*Ode on the Poetical Character.*

Or take the ' frugal note ' of Gray :

Still is the toiling hand of care ;  
The panting herds repose ;  
Yet hark, how thro' the peopled air  
The busy murmur glows !  
The insect youth are on the wing,  
Eager to taste the honied spring. . . .

To contemplation's sober eye  
 Such is the race of man :  
 And they that creep, and they that fly,  
 Shall end where they began.

*On the Spring.*

While some on earnest business bent  
 Their murmuring labours ply  
 'Gainst graver hours, that bring constraint  
 To sweeten liberty :  
 Some bold adventurers disdain  
 The limits of their little reign,  
 And unknown regions dare descry.  
 Still as they run they look behind,  
 They hear a voice in every wind,  
 And snatch a fearful joy.

*On a Distant Prospect of Eton College.*

The light balance of the rhythm is the first point that strikes us. Milton had used it in his twin odes, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* :

Such sights as youthful poets dream  
 On summer eves by haunted stream.  
 Then to the well-trod stage anon,  
 If Jonson's learned sock be on,  
 Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
 Warbling his native wood-notes wild.

But he had left it soon for the more elaborate cadences of his allusive *Lycidas* :

Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,  
 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
 Where the great Vision of the guarded mount  
 Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold,

leading to the true Miltonian music of the blank verse of *Paradise Lost*. And even in the earlier poems there is a difference to be discerned, which the reader must seize for the full understanding of 'romance'. Collins and Gray—for in this context it is not necessary to discriminate—try to identify

themselves with the scene which they describe, and try to establish a sympathy between its natural and its human aspects. In the words of Collins which we have underlined, 'teach me but once like him to feel'; in his trembling pursuit of Milton's 'guiding steps' till he comes as near as he can to participate in the elder poet's sentiment; in the analogy sought by Gray between the herds, the insects, and the race of man; in his discovery of 'a voice in every wind' tempering the school-boy's joy, we have a warmer and a more intimate revelation than is vouchsafed by Milton's detached record of '*such sights as youthful poets dream on summers eves by haunted stream*'. Collins and Gray are the youthful poets themselves, seeking to obliterate the conditions of time and space—the '*on*' and the '*by*' of Milton—and to merge these particular observations in a single impression of the emotional state which such conditions combine to produce. If for a moment we may illustrate the tendency of Collins and Gray by the achievement of William Wordsworth (1770–1850), we would quote a passage from *The Excursion*, in which the limits of place and tense most completely disappear, and re-combine to form the mood:

Sound needed none,  
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank  
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,  
All melted into him; they swallowed up  
His animal being; in them did he live,  
And by them did he live; they were his life.  
In such access of mind, in such high hour  
Of visitation from the living God,  
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.

*Excursion*, I, 201.

'Some bold adventurers disdain the limits of their little reign, And unknown regions dare descry'—Gray, with his 'frugal note', is speaking of the games of schoolboys, not without reference, however, to the larger analogy of human life; but the phrase may stand to typify the movement of poetry as a whole in this age which was forcing back the barriers of the 'unknown'. And not the least part of our delight in revisiting the earlier poets of the Romantic movement is derived from what sound like echoes in the writings of later poets, but what—more properly considered—are signs of the progress of the muse, moving with more exquisite security as she ranges more freely on the heights. We who have heard her in the valley shall recognize her footsteps on the hills:

The meanest floweret of the vale,  
The simplest note that swells the gale,  
The common sun, the air, the skies,  
To him are opening Paradise.

So the morning muse of Romance in an ode of Thomas Gray; and do we not recognize her footsteps in a later ode by Wordsworth? :

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The muse which inspired the *Hymn* added by James Thomson to his four books of *The Seasons*,

These, as they change, Almighty Father, these  
Are but the varied God. The rolling year  
Is full of thee



is heard again, in 1802, in the *Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni* \* :

Thou, too hoar Mount ! with thy sky-pointing peaks,  
Oft from whose feet the avalanche, unheard,  
Shoots downward, glittering through the pure serene,  
Into the depth of clouds that veil thy breast—  
Thou too again, stupendous Mountain ! thou  
That as I raise my head, while bowed low  
In adoration, upward from thy base  
Slow travelling with dim eyes suffused with tears,  
Solemnly seemest, like a vapoury cloud,  
To rise before me—Rise, O ever rise,  
Rise like a cloud of incense from the Earth !  
Thou kindly Spirit throned among the hills,  
Thou dread ambassador from Earth to Heaven,  
Great hierarch ! tell thou the silent sky,  
And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun  
Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God.

And an attentive ear will catch the same sound again in a score of passages from Gray to George Meredith.

For it fell to the writers of this age not merely—by their return to the old masters—to set lines of poetic invention for the succeeding century and a half ; it fell to them further to set models of style, from which—in blank verse, at least—Tennyson was the first to break away. Thus, it is an interesting exercise, and more fruitful of understanding than pages of criticism, to compare some consecutive phases of the metre known as the heroic couplet. Successive examples may be selected from Dryden, who flourished in 1670, Pope—1730—, Crabbe—1810—, Keats—1820—, and William

\* By Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834). ‘Coleridge’s *Hymn in the Valley of Chamouni* follows, so closely as only genius in its audacity can follow, the *Hymn of Thomson*’. E. Gosse : *Thomson* (Muses Library, xl).

Morris (1834-1896), who flourished in 1870. The comparison, it will be seen, extends over two centuries, and special attention should be given, not to the poetic content of the examples chosen, but to the varieties of technique which they respectively display.

First, we repeat from Dryden a few lines quoted above (p. 243) :

Of moral knowledge poesy was queen,  
And still she might, had wanton wits not been ;  
Who, like ill guardians, lived themselves at large,  
And, not content with that, debauched their charge.  
Like some brave captain, your successful pen  
Restores the exiled to her crown again ;  
And gives us hope that, having seen the days  
When nothing flourished but fanatic bays,  
All will at length in this opinion rest,  
' A sober prince's government is best '.

Next, sixty years afterwards, from Pope's *Essay on Man* :

Hope humbly then ; with trembling pinions soar ;  
Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore.  
What future bliss he gives not thee to know,  
But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.  
Hope springs eternal in the human breast :  
Man never is, but always to be blest.  
The soul, uneasy and confined, from home,  
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.  
Lo ! the poor Indian, whose untutor'd mind  
Sees God in Clouds, or hears him in the wind ;  
His soul proud science never taught to stray  
Far as the solar walk or milky way.

Thirdly, eighty years later, from the third of Crabbe's *Tales* :

Far different he from that dull plodding tribe,  
Whom it was his amusement to describe ;  
Creatures no more enliven'd than a clod,  
But treading still as their dull fathers trod ;

Who lived in times when not a man had seen  
Corn sown by drill, or thresh'd by a machine :  
He was of those whose skill assigns the prize  
For creatures fed in pens, and stalls, and sties ;  
And who, in places where improvers meet,  
To fill the land with fatness, has a seat ;  
Who in large mansions live like petty kings,  
And speak of farms but as amusing things ;  
Who plans encourage, and who journals keep,  
And talk with lords about a breed of sheep.

Fourthly, about the same time—for Crabbe's lifetime included that of Keats—from Keats's *Endymion* :

What misery most drowningly doth sing  
In lone Endymion's ear, now he has raught  
The goal of consciousness ? Ah, 'tis the thought,  
The deadly feel of solitude : for lo !  
He cannot see the heavens, nor the flow  
Of rivers, nor hill-flowers running wild  
In pink and purple chequer, nor, up-pil'd,  
The cloudy rack slow journeying in the west,  
Like herded elephants ; nor felt, nor prest,  
Cool grass, nor tasted the fresh slumberous air ;  
But far from such companionship to wear  
An unknown time, surcharg'd with grief, away,  
Was now his lot.

Lastly, for our present purpose, from the prologue to *The Earthly Paradise* by the socialist poet and artist, William Morris :

Then might be seen how hard is this world's lot  
When such a marvel was our grief forgot,  
And what a thing the world's joy is to bear,  
When on our hearts the broken bonds of care  
Had left such scars, no man of us could say  
The burning words upon his lips that lay ;  
Since, trained to hide the depths of misery,  
Amidst that joy, no more our tongues were free.  
Ah, then it was indeed when first I knew,  
When all our wildest dreams seemed coming true,  
And we had reached the gates of Paradise  
And endless bliss, at what unmeasured price  
Man sets his life.

Now, numbering these extracts 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, what is there to observe? Nascent in 1, and mature in 2, we mark the conception of the couplet as a self-contained unit, with a wholesome respect for its characteristic feature of the sound-repetition at the end of the second line. This wholesome respect impels the poets to maintain the up-and-down movement of the syllables, ensuring that, whatever variations of stress may be admitted at the opening of any verse, the verse shall recover its swing not later than the second beat and proceed undisturbed to its termination in a short and long quantity (u-). Thus, though Dryden admits 'who, like' (-u), 'Like some' (-u) and 'All will' (-) as the first feet of verses, the lines recover themselves before the second beat is completed, and swing back to the short-long measure. So Pope's 'Wait the' (-u), 'Rests and' (-u), 'Far as' (-u), occur at the beginning of lines which close respectively with 'adóre', 'to cóme', and 'wáy'. Pope, moreover, perfects the habit to which Dryden tends of epigrammatic utterance; and this habit, arising from conditions of thought which have been sufficiently examined, is inevitably assisted by the metrical restrictions which these writers accepted. As long as they deliberately preferred to forgo the delight of varied sound by including their sentences in twenty syllables with regularly alternating beats, with the rhyme recurring in a fixed place, and with a stop at every twentieth syllable, like the stroke of a hammer, they were obliged, in order to provide a compensatory pleasure in the reader, to achieve, conformably with these conditions, a striking dex-

terity of expression. The metre in itself is insufferably monotonous, but the monotony of sound was disguised by ever-renewed triumphs of exquisite neatness in arrangement. Within the confines of a metre more rigid in its rules than any before or since invented, Pope succeeded in cultivating a style so admirably fitted to it that his couplets fall on our ears with a constantly fresh surprise, a constantly new delight.

In 3, and curiously in 5, where the poet goes back to a fashion which his own generation had abandoned, the monotony is more obvious. The ear waits for the rhyme, which tends to become an annoyance, because, while the metre is maintained with little or no relaxation, its compensating genius has departed. Crabbe's respect for the couplet is hardly less devout than Pope's. He, too, works up to the twentieth syllable through regular disyllabic beats, and the rhythm of each couplet is complete. But the spirit of completeness has disappeared. The sense stumbles from couplet to couplet on the tap-tapping crutch of the relative pronoun, 'whom', 'who', 'whose', 'and who', 'who', 'who', 'who'; and the variety denied to the sound, which Pope introduced through the sense, thus making the metre the one best vehicle of his meaning, is denied to Crabbe altogether. He used for narrative purposes a metre adapted to terse expression, without attempting to re-adapt it to his different design. Morris, when he revived it at a much later date, was more or less consciously working in an artificial mould. His use of the couplet in 5 owes very much to 4, to which we now come,



but it was not outside his intention to avail himself of the languor suggested by the monotonous movement which the metre—unaided—provides.

Keats, in 4, has succeeded in breaking the spell of the metre. Designing, like Crabbe, to tell a story, and not, like Pope, to polish epigrams, his artistic instinct impelled him to break through the barriers of sound. He inherited his metrical form from the eighteenth century in which he was born, but he adapted it to the uses of romantic narrative by a fresh and a more technical disguise. He rebelled against the tyranny of the twentieth syllable, suffering the stress to pass—hardly noted—into the succeeding line or lines. It is not merely that the sense overflows from the end of one couplet to the beginning of another; but the ear waits, not for the rhyme, but for the more important sounds beyond. 'He raught [reached] the goal of consciousness', and the goal is the significant word. 'The thought, the deadly feel of solitude', and the quick substitution of the more correct word—'feel'—hurries us past the rhyme in 'thought'. 'With flowers running wild in pink and purple chequer'—the element of delight in these sounds lies in the alliterative 'p' and 'p', which settles on the consciousness and obliterates the passing impression of the less eminent rhyming word 'wild'. And before 'wear' in the last couplet is completed by 'away', the reader's attention has been distracted by the great sound of 'an unknown time, surcharg'd with grief', so that the word which is to be rhymed passes lightly.

All this is very technical, but its interest is not remote from the larger aspects of English litera-

ture. The gradual disguise of rhyme is merely the beginning of its disuse, and with the return of poets to the blank verse of Marlowe, Shakespeare and Milton, they returned to the ampler air on the freer heights of those masters. The style of a writer is the expression of his personality ; if he be passionate and sensuous—open, that is to say, to the lighter or deeper moods evoked by the play of his feelings and his senses—his expression will not consent to the trammels cheerfully worn by a writer who is satisfied to observe only the appearances of things. ‘ True wit is nature to advantage drest ’, so ran the counsel of the eighteenth century ; but when true wit took recourse to more primitive nature in her woods and on her sea, when each man’s wit was exercised to read for himself and by himself—and to interpret to his fellows—the truth which nature reveals, to add one line or curve to the revelation of beauty, and no longer to acquiesce in conventional forms, whether of art, government or morality, then the dress which fashion prescribed—the propriety of common consent—was gradually thrown aside ; a less hampering mode became imperative ; the forgotten lyre was struck with a more and more certain hand ; the forbidding limits were overrun ; and art brought to life what the universe demands of its interpreters—an infinite love and an infinite hope, rising within the confines of experience, but never moulded to its likeness, never ground by its grooves. Art bringing these resources is art employing imagination to amplify and to adorn the restricted message of human reason ; and it is with the forms of this art in the literature of England from 1780 to the present day that our concluding chapters are concerned.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ON COUNTRY ROADS

'Go through, go through the gates ; prepare ye the way of the people ; cast up, cast up the highway ; gather out the stones ; lift up a standard for the people'.

ISAIAH

A FAVOURITE recreation of this age, and a mode which suggests some conclusions as to the leisure available for cultivation and the kindly interests which filled it before the successive reigns of steam and electricity, was the lost art of letter-writing. Thomas Gray, author of the *Elegy* ; Horace Walpole (1717-1797), whose position and character make his voluminous correspondence a source of unique interest and information ; Oliver Goldsmith ; Boswell, the biographer ; Lord Chesterfield, whose 'letters to his son' take their place among the classics ; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) in a slightly older generation, wife of the Turkish Ambassador and friend of Pope—these are one or two of the men and women to whom the writing of letters was a pleasure in itself, conferring pleasure upon others, and occupying some of the time which the resources of scientific invention enable us to use to-day in the pursuit of business.

Doubtless, we are happier for these resources ; happier in the only sense in which happiness is

desirable—in the ampler powers which they confer of useful and serviceable work. The prolongation of life, in the old phrase, is literally fulfilled to-day when the problem of physical distance has been considerably solved by train, steamship, and motor, and the telegraph and telephone. And the conquest of distance brings with it an increase of strength to life, a fuller employment of energy, and a more satisfactory correspondence between capacity and achievement. Take for a moment an expression of the non-correspondence of these two—of the excess of capacity over achievement—which Robert Browning (1812–1889), a grave and brave poet who believed in the fullest exercise of vitality, put into the mouth of Cleon, an imaginary writer at the time of the birth of Christ :

Every day my sense of joy  
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified  
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen ;  
While every day my hairs fall more and more,  
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase—  
The horror quickening still from year to year,  
The consummation coming past escape  
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—  
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,  
Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,  
Alive still, in the praise of such as thou,  
I, I, the feeling, thinking, acting man,  
The man who loved his life so over-much,  
Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,  
I dare at times imagine to my need  
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,  
Unlimited in capability  
For joy, as this is in desire for joy ;  
To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us.

To most of us, it is true, ' the joy-hunger ' does not constantly appeal with that vivid and bitter

keenness which Cleon expresses so well. The edge of desire is blunted, it may be by anticipation of disappointment, or it may be by indolence and inertia; and, though we may vaguely feel that, with more time at our disposal, we might achieve better results, yet we commonly acquiesce, with rare impulses of revolt, in that 'quickenings horror' of the body's decay while the mind is still active. The impulse of revolt possibly comes to every man, except the most insensible, 'once, and only once, and for One only', as Browning expresses it in another poem, despite the tendency to hard silence engendered by worldly experience and the fret of petty circumstances from which there is no escape. A sustained habit of mind not dominated by such experience and superior to such circumstances, yet preserving in its detachment a sympathy—indignant or pitiful—with the weaker minds submerged is, in one respect, the *differentia* between a poet or artist and an ordinary man. But the fictitious poet of Browning's poem helps us, perhaps, to appreciate one aspect of civilization which has improved the conditions he deplures. It is not that the telephone, as such, satisfies the 'joy-hunger', as such. It is arguable, however, that the enlarged opportunities of self-expression and inter-communication, of which telephony is an instance, help to lessen the difference between capability and desire. These opportunities, properly employed, help to satisfy at least our senses. We can see more and hear more in the same amount of space and time, for we have tamed the waves of the sea and the air.

It is interesting to note some of the consequences



to literature of this extended physical capacity. The mere disuse of certain words and certain figures of speech, though obvious, is noteworthy. Thus, the sailing-ship gradually disappears from the intimate language of literature and acquires the dignity of the antique. The inn and the stage coach, again, with all their wealth of association and all the romance that attached to that mode of travel, are gathered into the past. These are external signs, mere marks of changes of habit, not much more interesting in themselves than the substitution of the cane for the sword. A mark of a deeper change—a change in mood, not in accidents—is the fact from which this digression started that the art of letter-writing was disused. When travel was slow and distance was real, not apparent; when the waters of sea and ocean divided the peoples on their shores, and were regarded as agents of separation rather than as a convenient means for the ceaseless traffic of vessels of communication; when no iron rails were laid between one place and another, supplying a never-failing sense of union and communion; when no wires were stretched for the transmission of a message on wings swifter than a bird's, and no telegraph-poles, planted on country-roads, dispelled the shadows of solitude by a sudden invading apprehension of human fellowship and nearness—then not merely was it true that the larger leisure on men's hands enabled them to gratify the tastes and remove the anxieties of absent friends; not merely did the conditions of the letter-writers fit in with the conditions of their correspondents—the art arising out of environment—but a senti-

ment existed, and a new sentiment took its place, both of which are of the utmost value to literary style and to the content of literature.

All art—let us seize this clearly—is a natural expression of emotion. The form which the expression assumes is determined by the kind of the feeling. If I prick you, you cry ; if I tickle you, you laugh. The cry or the laugh is a part of the feeling ; the expressive part ; the part which finds a voice, if the feeling be true and deep—a louder cry for a deeper stab, a heartier laugh for more stirring mirth. And so precisely with art-expression. As the emotion is, so the expression is : they are the inward and outward parts of one process. Starting with the simplest sensation, as of tickling or a prick, the sense-perception may pass, in its inward-striking process, through most complicated stages. The series of emotional associations which the sense of smell may arouse is only one instance out of many of the powers of this machinery. Recollection acting on emotion sets at work in the minds of great men the stored-up forces of imagination, and the images thus conceived are wrought to artistic shape, and pass in the fulness of time, through the outward-pressing stages, to the glorious pangs of art-expression. There are many who feel without expression : their emotion does not strike root on fertilizing soil : they are artists in everything but productivity ; and to them, perhaps, is applied the splendid phrase of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), ' We are all poets when we read a poem well ' ; for, missing the joy of self-expression, they acquire a kind of foster-parentage

to the products of other minds, in which the process of art has been completed by expression. There are others, again, who express without feeling; who instead of creating works of art, manufacture models of beauty perfect in all respects except the soul. Thus, the sonneteering vogue of the earlier period of Queen Elizabeth was largely artificial; 'men and women', as Mr Sidney Lee writes\*, 'of the cultivated Elizabethan nobility encouraged poets to celebrate in single sonnets their virtues and graces, and under the same patronage there were produced multitudes of sonnet-sequences which more or less fancifully narrated, after the manner of Petrarch and his successors, the pleasures and pains of love'. Odes and poems written to order by laureates patronized by the Court are likewise liable to artificiality, and some experiments in style by writers of all ages are open to the same reproach. Moreover, the cultivation of expression without reference to its origin in feeling may produce a morbid kind of literature, aiming at bizarre effects, or at false or forced emotions in the reader, which can be illustrated from modern fiction as readily as elsewhere.

Thus, we come back to our contention that art resides in the harmony of its inward and outward parts, and it follows that the disappearance of an art-form involves the disuse or atrophy of a range of sentiment. Men do not cease to write epics, or novels, or ballads because they are tired of that exercise and seek a change of style. The

\* *Life of William Shakespeare*, vii. Smith, Elder & Co.

cessation, equally with the beginning, is independent of the volition of the writers. They began because they must, and they leave off because they must not go on. The disappearance and intestacy, so to speak, of the letter-writers of the eighteenth century is a statement of more than the bare fact. It states the opening of a new age in social and moral development—an age in which sympathy with humankind was less and less to be bounded by physical obstacles of space, in which understanding and tolerance were to spread along the roads and by the means of communication, and in which so quickly was the light to be diffused through the newly-won world that English poets were to sing, not of England's liberties and equality, but of a 'pantisocracy' on the banks of the Susquehanna, a Universal State where every man is equal and where every man is free. For the sake of such enlightened dreams, and of the improvements in practice which they inspire, literature may be content to forgo the obsolete form of the letter.

Literature, as was shown in our first chapter, is so essential and inseparable a part of the nation's life as a whole that no change in the forms which it assumes can properly be considered without reference to the life which it reflects. The withered branch of letter-writing, which sentimentalists who forget the whole in the contemplation of the part are sometimes tempted to deplore, is to be viewed in connection with the stronger vigour of the tree in higher and more forward directions. The stimulus to trade and commerce which the mechanical inventions of the eighteenth century

provided, and which, taken in conjunction with the social changes they induced, marks that epoch in our history as the age of industrial revolution, accompanied the transition of thought from a national to an international ideal. The family, the city, the nation, the civilized world—these are the successive centres of men's hopes, and strivings, and ambitions; the successive idols of that sentiment which, according to circumstances, is called *esprit de corps*, patriotism, imperialism. If the river, the sea, and the ocean mark the stages of the conquest of trade-routes, the city, the nation and the cosmos mark the influence of trade on life. The cosmopolitan sentiment which came to its ripest expression about the middle of the nineteenth century in England—politically, in Cobden and Free Trade and the Exhibition of 1851; poetically, in Tennyson's lines about 'the federation of the world' \*—has received what will probably prove merely a temporary set-back in the more recent tendency to national sentiment in younger countries. Germany, for instance, which attained the goal of national unity within the memory of middle-aged men, is only the most conspicuous of the nations who seek to establish their power on the exclusive economic system which England has rejected. But, as Dr Cunningham reminds us in his *Essay on Western Civilization* †: 'other nations may not improbably come

\* Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd

In the Parliament of Man, the federation of the world.

Locksley Hall.

† Cambridge University Press, p. 265.



in time to outgrow the nationalist policy they are pursuing so eagerly at present. They may have it forced upon them by experience that they can obtain access to the largest markets and secure the commodities they require on the best terms, not by maintaining particularist rights but by fostering frequent and general commercial intercourse. Cobden's expectations of the universal adoption of free trade have been wofully disappointed ; a nation must be far advanced in its economic life before it finds its greatest advantage in adopting a cosmopolitan policy ; but this is a stage of development to which commercial nations are likely sooner or later to attain'. And all this arises directly out of the disuse of the art of letter-writing, when the better facilities of intercourse and travel made its practice less vital to social happiness.

Among the letter-writers of this age was William Cowper (1731-1800), one of the most pathetic and most attractive figures in English literature. 'I live to write letters', he said on one occasion to a cousin ; and, though he lived to better purpose to write *The Task*, *John Gilpin*, *Table-talk*, and other works, his remark is true in a sense of the long, dark period of his life from his thirty-second to his seventieth year, when successive attacks of religious and nervous melancholia rendered him practically unfit for direct human intercourse. It is true in the further sense that his correspondence remains as a particularly charming memorial of a man whose genial brain was liable to so cruel a disease. Take, for his fluency in writing, and likewise for its biographic

interest, the following passage from a letter to Mrs Cowper, whose husband, Major Cowper, had tried so hard to help his cousin a year or two before to a clerkship in the House of Lords, the terror of competing for which brought on the poet's first attack of suicidal mania. The letter is dated from Huntingdon, October 20, 1766 :

We breakfast commonly between eight and nine ; till eleven, we read either the Scripture or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries ; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day ; and from twelve till three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where with Mrs Unwin and her son I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you* that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness ; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers.

And then, explaining his reluctance to give practical shape to his pietistic tendencies by taking holy orders, he adds : ' had I the zeal of Moses, I should want an Aaron to be my spokesman '.

Take, fourteen years later, at Olney, February, 1780, the following extract from a letter to the

Rev. William Unwin, now grown an attached friend :

Alas ! what can I do with my wit ? I have not enough to do great things with, and these little things are so fugitive, that while a man catches at a subject, he is only filling his hand with smoke. I must do with it as I do with my linnet ; I keep him for the most part in a cage, but now and then set open the door, that he may whisk about the room a little, and then shut him up again.

Poor Cowper's ' whisking wit ', poised on a linnet's flight : his ready sympathy with tame, shy things is one of his delightful characteristics.

The linnet born within the cage,  
That never knew the summer woods,

in Tennyson's well-known phrase \*, would never wholly have been deprived by Cowper of its hour of memory of freedom.

Take, from a still later letter, to his friend and biographer, William Hayley, July, 1792 : ' I am hunted by spiritual hounds in the night season '—surely the epitome and pith of this morbid excess of religiousness. ' I cannot help it. You will pity me, and wish it were otherwise ; and though you may think there is much of the imaginary in it, will not deem it for that reason an evil less to be lamented. So much for fears and distresses. Soon I hope they shall all have a joyful termination, and I, my Mary, my Johnny, and my dog, be skipping with delight at Eartham '—Hayley's home, near Chichester. And take, lastly, near the ' termination ', to his cousin, Lady Hesketh, from Mundesley, in Norfolk, October,

\* *In Memoriam*, xxvii.

1798—the year of the appearance of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* :

You describe beautiful scenes, but you describe them to one who, if he ever saw them, could receive no delight from them—who has a faint recollection, and so faint as to be like an almost forgotten dream, that once he was susceptible of pleasure from such causes. . . . My state of mind is a medium through which the beauties of Paradise itself could not be communicated with any effect but a painful one. . . . We shall meet no more.

The facts of Cowper's life are almost all included in these extracts. His long residence with the Unwins is there and his filial devotion to Mrs Unwin ; Lady Hesketh's hardly interrupted affection ; his literary friendships ; his dreams, his brooding ; his decline. There remain only to be added a brief reference to two names, that of the Rev. John Newton, the Calvinist curate of Olney, whose guest and disciple at one time he became, by no means to the advantage of his always excessive pietism, and that of Lady Austen, who would seem to have misconstrued his brotherly liking, and with whom he quarrelled in 1784 owing to Mrs Unwin's jealousy. This is the external record of a life on a broken wing. More germane to the man is Taine's brilliant characterization \* : ' His talent is but the picture of his character, and his poems but the echo of his life. Affectionate, full of freedom and innocent raillery, with a natural and charming imagination, a graceful fancy, an exquisite delicacy, and so unhappy ! He was one of those to whom women devote themselves, whom they love maternally, first by compassion,

\* *History of English Literature*, Bk. IV. ch. ii.

then by attraction. He smiled as well as he could, but with effort ; it was the smile of a sick man who knows himself incurable, and tries to forget it for an instant, at least to make others forget it. Poor, charming soul, perishing like a frail flower : the world's temperature was too rough for it ; and the moral law, which should have supported it, tore it with its thorns '. Add to this the pet hares, the garden, the country walks and fireside talks, with which he filled his waking life, and we are ready to read his poetry in the spirit in which it was conceived, as the innocent recreation of a mind distracted by terrors self-evolved.

And how fresh and simple is his verse, though so little later than Pope's :

Oh, that those lips had language ! Life has passed  
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.

*On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture.*

John Gilpin was a citizen  
Of credit and renown,  
A train-band captain eke was he  
Of famous London town.

John Gilpin's spouse said to her dear,  
' Though wedded we have been  
These thrice ten tedious years, yet we  
No holiday have seen '.

*John Gilpin.*

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform ;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

*Light Shining out of Darkness \*.*

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\* From the ' Olney Hymns ', written with John Newton, Cowper's contributions being signed ' C '.



I sing the Sofa. I who lately sang  
Truth, Hope, and Charity, and touched with awe  
The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand  
Escaped with pain from that adventurous flight,  
Now seek repose upon an humbler theme.

*The Task* \*.

Toll for the Brave !  
The brave that are no more !  
All sunk beneath the wave  
Fast by their native shore !

*Loss of the Royal George.*

The poplars are felled, farewell to the shade  
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade ;  
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,  
Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives.

*The Poplar Field.*

I am monarch of all I survey ;  
My right there is none to dispute ;  
From the centre all round to the sea  
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.  
O Solitude ! where are the charms  
That sages have seen in thy face ?  
Better dwell in the midst of alarms  
Than reign in this horrible place.

*Alexander Selkirk.*

The twentieth year is well nigh past  
Since first our sky was overcast ;  
Ah, would that this might be the last :

My Mary ! . . .

Thy needles, once a shining store,  
For my sake restless heretofore,  
Now rust disused, and shine no more ;

My Mary !

*To Mary Unwin.*

No voice divine the storm allay'd,  
No light propitious shone,

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\* Lady Austen suggested 'anything' as the subject of a poem—'this sofa', for example. Cowper accepted 'the task', and wrote six books of blank verse on domestic, social and moral topics between 1783-85.

When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,  
 We perish'd, each alone ;  
 But I beneath a rougher sea,  
 And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.  
*The Castaway.*

These lines, which open or close some of the chief poems, long and short, of Cowper, the Buckinghamshire poet, are full of the restrained colour and gentle movement characteristic of the scenes in which his troubled life was passed. We may add the testimony of single lines :

Dupe of *to-morrow*, even from a child  
 God made the country, and man made the town  
 England, with all thy faults, I love thee still  
 There is a public mischief in your mirth  
 There is a pleasure in poetic pains  
 I knew at least one hare that had a friend  
 He is the freeman whom the truth makes free  
 Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much ;  
 Wisdom is humble that he knows no more

—a warning which reverberates through the poetry of the succeeding century, in Wordsworth's

The world is too much with us ; late and soon,  
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers ;

in Tennyson's

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and the world is  
 more and more.

If we add, too, the fact that Cowper, like Pope, is the author of a verse-translation of Homer, we shall see how varied were the interests of this writer, across whose work, as Professor Courthope

says, was cast the shadow of the 'coming individualism' in England.

For his importance, historically speaking, lies in this consideration, which must be taken in connection with what was said just now about the effects of the industrial revolution, and the transition of thought from a national to a cosmopolitan ideal. It might seem a paradox of criticism to expect a cosmopolitan note from the retired and melancholy genius whose frail, unhappy life was preserved to art by the devotion of Mrs Unwin, and whose lot is so pitifully depicted by himself as sadder than that of the castaway,

But I beneath a rougher sea,  
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

'All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me', he might have said, in the plenitude of the Psalmist's despair; and yet this very experience of suffering, with the mental solitude that ensued, contained the seeds which were to ripen in less hardly-tried minds at a later, if an ampler, spring. 'Alas, what can I do with my wit?' he sighed, in an age when the wits of Goldsmith and Johnson were sharpened by contact with the busy world of London. Convention in phrase or thought was impossible to Cowper; with whom should he convene, save, for a few years, with John Newton, and always with his own pure heart? And out of the conditions thus made he was enabled to draw the inspiration which came to other poets by other discipline: the sympathy with suffering humanity, the tender care of brute creatures, the love of children and of flowers, the search for

nature's healing herbs, the sense of her equal dispensation mocked by the artificial differences of man. This levelling tendency was assisted by the teachings of the church, which is necessarily democratic, and to which Wesley and his followers lent so powerful an impetus in that age; and thus, by the impulse to simplicity, and by the training of the English Bible, Cowper's style broke away from the classical convention and anticipated in a marked degree the 'natural' revival of Wordsworth. And, perhaps, because he felt so deeply, Cowper instinctively rejected the adventitious aid of ornament. His unadorned language was emotional because emotion was his fare in daily life; he had no need to go out of his way to seek a more exotic diction. So he was bound to earth by a no less universal bond than the sense of fellowship with all his kind. In his own lonely experience he had lived through a French Revolution, and had reconstructed society on a humbler and a simpler basis. Read again the extracts from his poems above, and note how their effect resides in the cadence and the intense feeling, not in far-sought words or images. Read more deeply in his works, and this conviction will be strengthened.

I was a stricken deer that left the herd  
 Long since; with many an arrow deep infix'd  
 My panting side was charged, when I withdrew  
 To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.  
 There was I found by One who had himself  
 Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore,  
 And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.  
 With gentle force soliciting the darts,  
 He drew them forth, and healed and bade me live.  
 Since then, with few associates, in remote

And silent woods I wander, far from those  
 My former partners of the peopled scene ;  
 With few associates, and not wishing more.  
 Here much I ruminate, as much I may,  
 With other views of men and manners now  
 Than once, and others of a life to come.

The call of the English countryside to which Cowper responded so truly was heard in another poet's ears in these days of a waking social conscience. George Crabbe (1754-1832) was moved by the call, in the less protected circumstances of his life, to a harsher and a less hopeful message from reality to convention. By style, as we saw in the last chapter, he belongs to the Dryden and Pope tradition, to which Oliver Goldsmith in *The Deserted Village* and *The Traveller* clung likewise in thought, and with which he has affinities in his *Vicar of Wakefield* \*. Crabbe, indignantly rejecting the reconciliation of reason, did not pause, like Cowper, and, later, like Wordsworth, to seek the reconciliation of faith. Wordsworth wrote of poetry that 'it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity' †, and, of all that has been written in the century since this dictum, nothing comes nearer to the secret of

\* Cowper wrote of Pope in *Table-talk* that he

Made poetry a mere mechanic art,  
 And every warbler has the tune by heart.

It has been said of Goldsmith by Mr Austin Dobson that he adopted a 'halfway attitude between the poetry of convention and the poetry of nature—between the gradus-epithet of Pope and the direct vocabulary of Wordsworth'. Neither judgment is quite fair to either poet, but in an age of transition, transitional writers are inevitable.

† Grosart: *Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, II, 96.



poetic composition. Of Crabbe, the poet in homespun \*, it may, perhaps be said, that, true as his emotions were, he did not await the process of recollection in tranquillity. Open his works where we will †, we miss the tranquillizing force

\* Horace Smith (1779-1849), joint author with his brother James of the brilliant parodies known as *Rejected Addresses*, called Crabbe 'a Pope in worsted stockings', and Sir Leslie Stephen (*Hours in a Library*, 1899, vol. II) expands the half-truth of this epigram as follows: 'Unlike his contemporaries, Cowper and Burns, he adhered rigidly to the form of the earlier Eighteenth Century school. But Crabbe's clumsiness of expression makes him a very inadequate successor of Pope or of Goldsmith, and . . . he is connected with some tendencies of the school which supplanted his early models. So far as Wordsworth and his followers represented the reaction from the artificial to a love of unsophisticated nature, Crabbe is entirely at one with them. He did not, like his predecessors, write upon the topics which interested "persons of quality", and never gives us the impression of having composed his rhymes in a full-bottomed wig. He has gone out into country fields and village lanes, and paints directly from man and nature, with almost a cynical disregard of the accepted code of propriety'.

† They have lately been admirably edited in 'The Cambridge English Classics' by Dr Ward, of Peterhouse (3 vols.), and Mr Murray has recently published a translation by Mr Frederick Clarke, M.A., of *George Crabbe and his Times: a Critical and Biographical Study*, by René Huchon, Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Nancy. From this excellent volume, which is likely to become the standard English authority on the subject, the following sentences may be selected, in confirmation of the views expressed in the present chapter: 'Unlike Wordsworth, Crabbe adheres to the classic model perfected by Dryden and Pope. . . . Even before Cowper, he helped, more than any one, "to bring poetry back to nature." He prepared the way for a poet like Wordsworth, who, endowed with a keener sensibility, added lyricism to realism. A writer of transition, classical by origin, realistic by temperament, and romantic on very

of reflection added to contemplation. It is not altogether uncritical, though it sound meticulous, to say that one sign of this tranquillizing agency lies in the absence of notes of interjection and exclamation. These represent at first the vacant places of reflection; they appeal from primary observation to secondary contemplation. Hence, they are commonly removed from the poet's revised thought which issues in composition. In Crabbe, they are seldom thus removed. Page after page occurs with 'oh!', 'ah!', 'alas!', 'how!', 'see!', 'come!', and even 'lo!' at short intervals apart; and, behind this outer sign—as thought is ever behind form—is the 'pessimism' remarked by critics. Hazlitt, for instance, writing while Crabbe was still alive, declares that 'almost all his characters are tired of their lives, and you heartily wish them dead. Crabbe is too much of the parish beadle, an overseer of the country poor. He collects all the petty views of the human heart and superintends, as in a panopticon, a select circle of rural malefactors. With him there are but two moral categories, riches and poverty, authority and dependence. His parish ethics are the very worst model for a state: anything more degrading and helpless cannot well be imagined. In a word,

rare occasions, he failed to harmonize the contradictions which encountered one another in himself and in his poetry: taking his subjects from common life, he imposed on them the stiff, jerky movement of the heroic couplet; by nature a satirist and a man of *science*, he became a poet and a clergyman. He remained isolated, without imitators, and without disciples. But he wielded a decisive influence at the right moment' (*op. cit.*, pp. 487-88).

Crabbe is the only poet who has attempted and succeeded in the *still life* of tragedy : who gives the stagnation of hope and fear—the deformity of vice without the temptation—the pain of sympathy without the interest—and who seems to rely, for the delight he is to convey to his reader, on the truth and accuracy with which he describes only what is disagreeable '.

This judgment, taken from its context, is perhaps overdrawn. Crabbe would probably have answered that he painted what he saw, that riches and poverty in his countryside were in glaring contrast, that most poor men were weary of the struggle, that rustic hopes were strangled and rustic vice was deformed. It follows that his peculiar gift lay in exact presentation of those portions of the object on which his eye was fixed. He rarely saw the whole object, or, at least, he rarely stored its image for quiet contemplation, and for that interpretative treatment which aims at the highest truth. He did not—for the most part at least—select and recombine his facts of observation. His manner was that of the compiler rather than of the poet. On the other hand, as he says in his preface to his *Tales*, accuracy is not necessarily unpoetical, and Crabbe, whose work has been fortunate in enjoying of recent years a kind of St Martin's Summer, is still admirable on many grounds, and chiefly because he had the strength to depict the 'annals of the poor' in pure black and white, trusting that the mere narration would engage the sympathy of an age in which the way was preparing for the people.

Sprung of the people, like Crabbe, but speaking *through* them rather than *for* them, Robert Burns (1759-1796), far away in the north, found his utterance in song. His life, though it has been elaborately written, is not essential to the understanding of his verse, which is racy of the soil of his native Scotland, and instinct with the aspirations of the age, unconsciously assimilated by his genius. His lines 'To a Field Mouse' and 'To a Mountain Daisy', drenched in the vigour of new insight into nature's universal heart, where there is no desolating separation of one kingdom from another, ring with the truth of imagination and move with the music of the lyre, which he struck with passionate skill :

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain :  
The best-laid schemes o' mice and men  
Gang aft a-gley,  
And lea'e us nought but grief and pain  
For promised joy.

Still thou art blest, compared wi' me !  
The present only toucheth thee :  
But, och ! I backward cast my ee  
On prospects drear !  
And forward, though I canna see,  
I guess and fear.

'No thy lane' means 'not alone', and 'a-gley' is 'askew' or 'aslant', but the Scotisms add to the poetic effect rather than detract from it, inasmuch as for English ears they remove the meaning of the melody one stage further from the vernacular, one stage nearer to pure music. Or, take the stanzas to the daisy, in the first of which 'stoure' means 'dust' :

Wee, modest, crimson-tippéd flower,  
 Thou 's met me in an evil hour ;  
 For I maun crush amang the stoure  
     Thy slender stem :  
 To spare thee now is past my power,  
     Thou bonny gem.

There, in thy scanty mantle clad,  
 Thy snawie bosom sun-ward spread,  
 Thou lifts thy unassuming head  
     In humble guise :  
 But now the share uptears thy bed,  
     And low thou lies !

Such is the fate of artless maid,  
 Sweet floweret of the rural shade !  
 By love's simplicity betray'd  
     And guileless trust,  
 Till she, like thee, all soil'd, is laid  
     Low i' the dust.

Such is the fate of simple bard,  
 On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd !  
 Unskilful he to note the card  
     Of prudent lore,  
 Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,  
     And whelm him o'er !

Such fate to suffering worth is given,  
 Who long with wants and woes has striven,  
 By human pride or cunning driven,  
     To misery's brink,  
 Till, wrench'd of every stay but Heaven,  
     He, ruin'd, sink !

Even thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,  
 That fate is thine—no distant date ;  
 Stern Ruin's ploughshare drives, elate,  
     Full on thy bloom,  
 Till, crush'd beneath the furrow's weight,  
     Shall be thy doom !

What is it in these lyric poems, which moved Wordsworth to speak of Burns as 'the great genius who had brought poetry back to nature'?, which Tennyson praised for their shape, 'the



perfection of the berry', and for their light 'the radiance of the dewdrop'?, and which countless readers in all countries, and every reader in his own, greet with enthusiastic admiration? First, perhaps, their formal excellence, the very sound of the lyre, 'the chirp of Ariel', as Mr Meredith calls it in a lyric which is itself the quintessence of nature's voice rendered into words. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), another Scottish peasant who rose to genius in literature, takes Burns as one of his types of 'the Hero as Man of Letters' in his *Lectures on Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841); and he may have been thinking of Burns in an earlier lecture in the series on 'the Hero as Poet', where he writes: 'All deep things are Song. It seems somehow the very central essence of us, Song: as if all the rest were but wrappings and hulls. The primal element of us; of us, and of all things. The Greeks fabled of Sphere-Harmonies: it was the feeling they had of the inner structure of Nature; that the soul of all her voices and utterances was perfect music. Poetry, therefore, we will call *Musical Thought*. The Poet is he who thinks in that manner. At bottom, it turns still on power of intellect; it is a man's sincerity and depth of vision that makes him a Poet\*. See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of Nature *being* everywhere music, if you can only reach it'. Drunken, boorish, libertine though he might be—and his record is not free from these blemishes—Burns reached the

\* 'The chief quality of Burns is the *sincerity* of him. So in his Poetry, so in his Life'. Carlyle, *Lectures on Heroes: The Hero as Man of Letters*.

heart of nature in this sense. In a fine phrase coined by a modern writer, and by the power of the godhead within him, Burns saw the daisy 'from God's side', and not from 'the hither side', where we dwell \*. That mystery which we call genius gave him the 'God's side' view, gave this tiller of the soil that insight into nature which is expressed in song, and in no other language known to man. The thought and the song are one music, derived alike from the God's side. For the daisy perceived by our senses is planted and plucked, lives and dies, is catalogued by the gardener and classified by the botanist, but it is never understood :

I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower, but *if* I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

So Tennyson, many years after ; and Burns, in the dawn of the new wonder, never caring to state the problem, careless of any problem to be stated, wrought with nature to sing her own songs :

O my Love's like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June :  
O my Love's like the melodie  
That's sweetly play'd in tune.  
As fair art thou, my bonny lass,  
So deep in love am I :  
And I will love thee still, my Dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry.  
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi' the sun ;  
I will love thee still, my dear,  
While the sands of life shall run

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\* The writer is Mrs Alice Meynell. See her sonnet ' To a Daisy ', in *Poems*, John Lane, 1896.

—the passionate music vibrates, as on untamed waves, from human heart to heart :

John Anderson my jo, John,  
We clamb the hill thegither,  
And many a canty day, John,  
We've had with ane anither :  
Now we maun totter down, John,  
But hand in hand we'll go,  
And sleep thegither at the foot,  
John Anderson my jo.

The harmony is so perfect, the touch on the lyre is so true, that the words melt into the sound, and the poet seems to evoke, not words limited by meaning, but illimitable music—the soul of sound in word-forms. In a sense, but only a seeming sense, it would hardly matter what he says : his touch compels the chords. And withal, the new wonder wins expression. Who in this democratic age, in which the prerogatives of rank and birth are yielding to the higher rights of intellect and merit, fails to quote the burning words written more than a hundred years ago by the inspired Faun, as he has been called, the peasant-poet of Scotland ? :

A king can mak a belted knight,  
A marquis, duke, and a' that ;  
But an honest man's aboon his might,  
Guid faith, he maunna fa' that !  
For a' that, and a' that,  
Their dignities, and a' that,  
The pith o' sense, and pride o' worth,  
Are higher ranks than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may—  
As come it will for a' that—  
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,  
May bear the gree, and a' that ;

For a' that, and a' that,  
 It's comin' yet for a' that,  
 That man to man, the world o'er,  
 Shall brothers be for a' that !

(The 'gree' is the 'grade' or 'eminence'). Literature, counting her triumphs, has none more notable to record than the impassioned utterance of this prophet from the plough.

'The world of imagination is the world of eternity' \*: this was the explicit faith affirmed by William Blake (1757-1827), the first of a line of poets who were also artists or designers, among whom are to be reckoned Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) and William Morris (1834-1896). Blake's affinity to Burns, who was only two years his junior, is neither of place nor circumstances. Blake's life was passed in London, and he was certainly insane; Burns's riotous vitality was Scottish to the core. The affinity is rather to be sought in their common attitude to nature, and in their common belief in the superior truth of imagination over that of observation. The external world, as the senses perceive it, was insufficient—not self-sufficient—to them. Both sought to supply its deficiencies by reading deeper into its heart; but while Burns took delight in its sounds and sights for their own sake, and transmuted these records into music, Blake abstracted, as it were, their audible and visible qualities—all the qualities that appeal to sense-perception—and clutched in a lyrical ecstasy at impalpable

\* *Poems of William Blake*. Edited by W. B. Yeats, *Muses' Library*, p. 251.

abstractions. This is, of course, a hard saying, and Blake is often luminously simple: but an effort must be made to conceive the expression of an object in song when every attribute has been removed which can be seen, or heard, or touched, if we are at all to understand the mysticism or symbolism of Blake, whether as a lyrist or a painter:

' I have no name ;  
I am but two days old '  
—What shall I call thee ?  
' I happy am ;  
Joy is my name '  
—Sweet joy befall thee !

Pretty joy !  
Sweet joy, but two days old ;  
Sweet joy I call thee :  
Thou dost smile :  
I sing the while,  
Sweet joy befall thee !

Thus Blake of ' Infant Joy ', and the common, concrete, human baby, it will be seen, is refined to the quintessence of a smile. As it exists in the imagination, it is joy, and Blake tries to express nothing else, nothing accidental to that abstraction.

The beauty reached by this refinement is of an exquisite quality. We find it in a single word, as in the first stanza of ' The Tiger ':

Tiger, tiger, burning bright  
In the forests of the night,

where ' burning ' conveys the very spirit of tigerdom, the essential tiger-ness of the conception, abstracted from space and time. The word is



instinct with romance. We find it in complete poems, as in 'Auguries of Innocence':

To see the world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower ;  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour

where we see what Mr Yeats means when he says, 'the poems mark an epoch in English literature, for they were the first opening of the long-sealed well of romantic poetry; they, and not the works of Cowper and Thomson and Chatterton, being the true heralds of our modern poetry of nature and enthusiasm'\*. If 'epochs' in literature are to be 'marked' at all, instead of counting the stages of its growth by inheritance, Blake claims his share in this record.

It is not possible here to examine his work more fully, either as poet or as artist, in which capacity his designs for *The Grave* by Robert Blair (1697-1746) are, perhaps, his most remarkable achievement. Blake stands alone in his age, alone in his spiritual life. His significance in our present context lies in his unique contribution to the growing literature of the imagination. He returned to Elizabethan standards of poetic style, when he was not merely rhapsodical, and he surpassed many of his contemporaries in his care for children and dumb animals, and for all that partook of elements universal rather than transient.

\* *Op. cit.* Introduction, p. xxiii. The dispute as to who was 'first' in opening the casements is, of course, of no importance. The point is that they were set open by so many writers simultaneously.

It is to this that we return at the close of our study of the opening countryside, and of all that is implied in literature—through Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, Blake and some of their contemporaries—by the new or new-directed interest in nature and man. To render life under the aspect of the imagination becomes more and more the task of English and Scottish poets; and the prose-literature of the age was moved by similar desires. Interest was quickened in real things; reviews and newspapers were founded to satisfy this adult spirit of inquiry, confined no longer to a clique, but spreading through society at large. History began to take account, not merely of facts as such, not merely of its duty in compilation, but of facts in relation to their causes, whether in tendencies of thought and action or in the will of great men. If Gibbon represents the one school, Carlyle, the historian of heroes, in his *Frederick the Great* and his *French Revolution*, represents the other. Criticism became a fine art in Hazlitt, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb; while later, in Jeffrey, the *Edinburgh* reviewer, and in kindred writers on *The Quarterly* and *The Monthly*, it assumed that personal note in its expression of fixed principles which it maintains, though less immoderately, to this day. On all sides was a centralizing movement. The art of literature flourished by simultaneous sowing, as it were, in all parts of the now united kingdom, and every means of communication was employed to distribute its products evenly. Thus, the songs of Burns at Mossgiel were as finely finished as Blake's engravings in London; Thomas Carlyle at Craigenputtock was

as serious a force in literature as Macaulay at the War Office. The old classical convention was imperceptibly extended to include all works of art, without reference to their conformity to any one set of principles, and this catholicity of taste corresponded to the wider area and the deeper strata of production. The incoming people was asserting itself; and democracy, finding a voice, gave vocal expression to types of sentiment and opinion which art had passed over heretofore. The village characters of Crabbe; suffering nature with which Cowper sympathized; the daisy and the mouse of Burns; the legendary heroes revived by Scott, 'the wizard of the North', these and others were added to the material of literature; their thoughts and feelings, their sayings and doings enriched and enlarged its language, till, out of the shock to society which the French Revolution caused, the great writers of the new century constructed their message to the new age.

## CHAPTER XV

### A GROUP OF POETS

A wonder edges the familiar face :  
She wears no more that robe of printed hours ;  
Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers.

GEORGE MEREDITH

WHEN we come to the writers who by common consent are the leaders of the movement known as the Romantic Revival, we are struck at the outset by the simplicity of their work.

John Keats (1795-1821), the son of an ostler who married his master's daughter, writes at about nineteen years of age a sonnet to Charles Wells, a schoolfellow of his younger brother, who had sent him some roses :

As late I rambled in the happy fields,  
What time the skylark shakes the tremulous dew  
From his lush clover covert ; when anew  
Adventurous knights take up their dinted shields :  
I saw the sweetest flower wild nature yields,  
A fresh-blown musk-rose ; 't was the first that threw  
Its sweets upon the summer : graceful it grew  
As is the wand that Queen Titania wields.  
And, as I feasted on its fragrancy,  
I thought the garden rose it far excell'd :  
But when, O Wells, thy roses came to me  
My sense with their deliciousness was spell'd :  
Soft voices had they, that with tender plea  
Whisper'd of peace, and truth, and friendliness unquell'd.

There is not much in it, except the sonnet-form

itself, which the force of personal feeling was restoring to English literature, and except the echoes of Milton in 'What time' and the musk-rose, of Spenser in 'adventurous knights', and of Shakespeare in Titania. There is the influence, too, of the so-called 'Alexandrine' verse which closes the Spenserian stanza in the irregular length of the last line of the sonnet, and there is the pervasive atmosphere of the poets of an earlier tradition in the epithets in the first eight lines.

We may pass to another sonnet from the same hand, so early stilled by death, 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer', published in *The Examiner* on December 1, 1816, and noticed already above in a footnote on p. 44 :

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen ;  
 Round many western islands have I been  
 Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
 Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
 That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne :  
 Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
 Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold :  
 Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
 When a new planet swims into his ken ;  
 Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
 He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Here there is very much more than echoes of earlier masters, joined to an instinctive desire to live in the spirit of their enjoyment of simple and natural delights. There is Keats's first introduction to the Elizabethan version of the vivid, moving epic of the Greeks, and there is the association of that revelation in his mind with the stories in



Robertson's *History of America* of the early discoverers of the new world. Cortez should be Balboa, but the literal fact is unimportant to the reasoning which associates the psychology of both discoveries in a single expression of a truth of the intellectual imagination—true, not necessarily to accidents of space and time, but to abiding realities of universal passion and sentiment. Thus, the accidental qualities which space and time impart are neither required nor defined. 'Realms of gold' and 'western islands' are left in their wide connotation, and even the more definite region of the Homeric epos is sufficiently recalled to imagination, which needs no map or chart, by the 'one wide expanse' whereof we 'breathe the pure serene'. These bare qualities in the object, as recollected by the emotions not as presented to the senses, are recognizable by all. And, within this imaginative sphere, on the higher plane of this perception, the accidents and trappings which differentiate sense-experiences disappear. For the higher purpose of the imaginative reason, it is enough to recall the impression which the process of enlargement—whether of the physical or of the mental horizon—creates in a sensitive soul. Observation appeals to the diverse elements that divide. It distinguishes Chapman's reader conning Homer in a study at home from Cortez gazing at a new land from a mountain-top abroad. The records registered by observation are accurate and correct. If a biographical direction be given to them, the observation will take note of the special characteristics of Cortez; if historical, it will note the special circumstances of his achievements;

if scientific, it will note the special features of their results, and its record in each instance will be relatively true. The appeal of the imagination is to the common elements that unite. It seeks the underlying identity of the emotional states on which the accidents of time and place impinge. To the imagination it is indifferent whether Cortez was reading Chapman's Homer or Keats was staring at the Pacific. The records which it registers are independent of such facts in their actual connotation; it values them solely as containing the *data* for a further conclusion. Out of what is common to both series of experiences in space and time, imagination registers a record which becomes poetry or art, according to the direction which is given to it; and this record, be it noted, is equally accurate and correct, and partakes of a higher truth inasmuch as it demands for its expression a language capable of deeper tones than those of every day—a language which communicates with reason through the emotions which are universal and permanent rather than through sense-perception which varies with the particulars of experience. And so Keats can write in a poem to which we have referred before \*, as containing a message of revolt against the canons of the eighteenth century.

What though I am not wealthy in the dower  
Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know  
The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow  
Hither and thither all the changing thoughts  
Of man: though no great minist'ring reason sorts  
Out the dark mysteries of human souls

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\* *Sleep and Poetry*, 1817. See p. 218 above.

To clear conceiving : yet there ever rolls  
 A vast idea before me, and I glean  
 Therefrom my liberty ; thence too I've seen  
 The end and aim of Poesy.

The verse is juvenile and poor ; ' thoughts ' and ' sorts ' make a bad harmony, and ' Out the dark mysteries ' puts the emphasis on the weakest word. But the perception is there of the two pathways to truth, the way of ' spanning wisdom ' and ' clear conceiving ' and the way of the ' vast idea ', and somehow Keats, the ostler's son, who served in an apothecary's shop, steeped in Spenserian romance and fresh from his reading of *Lyrical Ballads* by Coleridge and Wordsworth, was resolved that his poetic part should be with the charioteer who drove in music through the universe :

The car is fled  
 Into the light of heaven, and instead  
 A sense of real things comes doubly strong,  
 And, like a muddy stream, would bear along  
 My soul to nothingness : but I will strive  
 Against all doubtings, and will keep alive  
 The thought of that same chariot, and the strange  
 Journey it went.

*Sleep and Poetry, 155-162.*

*Endymion, a Poetic Romance*, ' " The stretched metre of an antique song " \*, inscribed to the memory of Thomas Chatterton †, was begun in 1817, and was published in the following year. The poem is interesting on many grounds—its beauties, above all, which should be sought at first-hand—and it derives a kind of secondary interest from the facts of Keats's life and his relations to his critics.

\* From Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, xvii.

† See pp. 286 and foll. above.

The old tradition that the poet's death was hastened by his reviewers in *The Quarterly*, 'so savage and tartarly,' fostered by Byron and Shelley, has been hard to kill, but it is commonly admitted to-day that, at least until growing ill-health had weakened his powers of resistance, Keats felt himself benefited rather than injured by the attacks which were directed less at himself than at the rising school to which he was eager to belong. Lord Houghton correctly says that 'at this time literary criticism had assumed an unusually political complexion' due to 'the triumph of the advocates of established rights and enforced order over all the hopes and dreams that the French Revolution had generated'\*, and he quotes a letter from Keats to one of his publishers, Hessey, dated October 9, 1818, in which there is no evidence of excessive sensitiveness to criticism. Keats says :

I cannot but feel indebted to those gentlemen who have taken my part. As for the rest, I begin to get a little acquainted with my strength and weakness. Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on a man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what *Blackwood* or *The Quarterly* could inflict. . . . J. S. is perfectly right in regard to the "slipshod *Endymion*" . . . I will write independently. I have written independently *without judgment*. I may write independently, and *with judgment*, hereafter. The genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. . . . In *Endymion* I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice. I was never

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\* *Life and Letters of John Keats* (Routledge, New Universal Library), p. 141.

afraid of failure ; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest.

This is manlier and finer criticism than all the politico-polemics of Wilson \* and Lockhart † in *Blackwood* on 'The Cockney School of Poetry', with their personal impertinences ; and, though the poet's high spirit was broken before he died, yet Francis Jeffrey, writing in *The Edinburgh Review* in August, 1820—Keats died in the following spring—stated that he had been 'exceedingly struck with the genius 'displayed by Keats' poems, 'and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance' :

'They are flushed all over,' he continued, 'with the rich lights of fancy ; and so coloured and bestrewn with the flowers of poetry that, even while perplexed and bewildered in their labyrinths, it is impossible to resist the intoxication of their sweetness, or to shut our hearts to the enchantments they so lavishly present. A great part of the work, indeed, is written in the strangest and most fantastical manner that can be imagined. It seems as if the author had mentioned everything that occurred to him in the shape of a glittering image or striking expression, and so wandered on till he had covered his pages with an interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures. . . . In this rash and headlong career ['I leaped headlong into the sea in *Endymion*' as Keats wrote in a letter which Jeffrey could not have seen] he has of course many lapses and failures. There is no work, accordingly, from which a malicious critic could cull more matter for ridicule. But we do not take *that* to be our office.'

and Jeffrey is 'much inclined to add' that he does not know any book which he 'would sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him

\* See p. 285 above.

† John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854), biographer of Sir Walter Scott. Editor of *The Quarterly Review*, 1825-53.



a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm '\*.

It is by his shorter poems, rather than by *Endymion*, *Lamia*, or the unfinished *Hyperion*, that Keats lives in the hearts of his countrymen and has achieved a poet's immortality though he died at twenty-six. Yet the longer poems have their own delights, and out of them may be reconstructed not merely the influences that inspire them—that of Milton in *Hyperion* is the most pronounced—but the rapid development of the faculty to which Keats himself referred when he wrote to his publisher that, 'poetry must work out its own salvation in a man'. We trace in these longer works of the imagination the construction of a poet's faith and the irregular pathway hewn through a wilderness of beauty to the truth beyond what seems.

Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave  
A paradise for a sect; the savage too  
From forth the loftiest fashion of his sleep  
Guesses at heaven:

These are the opening lines of *The Fall of Hyperion; a Vision*, first printed by Lord Houghton thirty-five years after the poet's death, and now recognized as a fragment of a recast of the fragmentary *Hyperion*, with which Keats had been dissatisfied, owing partly to its Miltonism and partly to the fact that he had not sufficiently imbued the theme with the warmth of his own personality. The

\* *Essays on English Poets and Poetry from The Edinburgh Review*. By Francis Jeffrey (Routledge, New Universal Library), pp. 387-89.

opening lines contain a statement of the poet's point of view. As the fanatic weaves a paradise out of his lonely imaginings, as the mere savage conjectures a heaven out of his dream-consciousness \*, so

Poesy alone can tell her dreams,  
With the fine spell of words alone can save  
Imagination from the sable chain  
And dumb enchantment. Who alive can say,  
'Thou art no Poet—mayst not tell thy dreams?'

Every man, that is to say, has the vision within him, whether at the savage's stratum of guessing at heaven from a dream or at the poet's level of uttering heaven in song:

Since every man whose soul is not a clod  
Hath visions and would speak.

But

Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse  
Be poet's or fanatic's will be known  
When this warm scribe, my hand, is in the grave.

It was laid in the grave soon after!, but not too

\* It is impossible fully to understand the imaginative literature of the nineteenth century, the heir of all the ages of learning, without grasping the meaning of the word 'transcendental'. See above, pp. 263-64 and pp. 309-11. Professor J. A. Stewart, in his Introduction to *The Myths of Plato* (Macmillan, 1905), p. 35, says, in words which should be weighed: 'The chief end of poetry, then, is to induce Transcendental Feeling in the Poet's patient by throwing him suddenly, for a moment, into a state of dream-consciousness, out of a waking consciousness which the Poet supplies with objects of interest; the sudden lapse being effected in the patient by the communication to him of images and other products of the Poet's dream-consciousness through the medium of language'. This is the philosophy of the art which Keats teaches by practice.

soon for us to know that the dream of the altars and the prophecy of the goddess of imagination was true poet's, not fanatic's. Mr de Sélin-court, the latest editor of Keats, adds to his commentary on this poem a passage of twenty lines, not reproduced in Lord Houghton's editions of 1856 and 1867, but found in a copy made from the original manuscript of Keats by Richard Woodhouse. The Woodhouse MS., which belongs to Lord Crewe, was discovered in 1904, and is now the chief authority for the poem, the autograph of which is not extant. These details are perhaps more precise than the scope of our volume warrants, but it is interesting to see that Keats derived from his vision that high conception of his calling which he exemplified in his minor poems :

The Poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
The one pours out a balm upon the World,  
The other vexes it \*.

For the poet who Keats would have become, had fate added years to genius, aimed at the highest :

To see as a god sees †, and take the depth  
Of things as nimbly as the outward eye  
Can size and shape pervade.  
*The Fall of Hyperion*, 280-82.

To bear all naked truths,  
And to envisage circumstance, all calm,  
That is the top of sovereignty.  
*Hyperion*, Bk. II, 203-5.

\* *The Poems of John Keats*. Edited, etc., by E. de Sélin-court. (Methuen, 1905). P. 518.

† From the God-side, again. See p. 348 above.

This tranquil comprehension of the depths, this collected calm upon the heights,—

Hyperion, lo ! his radiance is here !

And the radiance was poured through the odes and minor poems. We have quoted more than once the wonderful lines—literally, full of wonder—from the *Ode to a Nightingale*, where Keats summons from the past and renders generously to the future the very spirit of romance :

Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird !  
 No hungry generations tread thee down ;  
 The song I hear this passing night was heard  
 In ancient days by emperor and clown :  
 Perchance the self-same song that found a path  
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;  
 The same that oft-times hath  
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

This unapproachable appeal from the mutable to the immutable, from the world

. . . where men sit and hear each other groan,  
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last, gray hairs,  
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies ;  
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
 And leaden eyed despairs,  
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
 Or new-Love pine at them beyond to-morrow,

to the world of unchanging beauty and of eternal love, partakes of the nature of that beauty and belongs to the things that are for all time.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
 Are sweeter ; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on ;  
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone : . . .

Ah, happy, happy boughs ! that cannot shed  
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu ;  
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
 For ever piping songs for ever new ;  
 More happy love ! more happy, happy love !  
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
 For-ever panting, and for ever young ;  
 All breathing human passion far above.

*Ode on a Grecian Urn.*

Here, too, from the bitter-sweet impact of un-resting experience on the everlasting ideal, removed from the accidents of mortality, 'all breathing human passion far above', Keats draws the poet's reconciliation of God with his universe.

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane  
 In some untrodden region of my mind,  
 Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,  
 Instead of pines, shall murmur in the wind. . . .  
 And in the midst of this wide quietness  
 A rosy sanctuary will I dress  
 With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,  
 With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,  
 Who, breeding flowers, will never breed the same :  
 And there shall be for thee all soft delight  
 That shadowy thought can win,  
 A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,  
 To let the warm Love in !

*Ode to Psyche.*

'A bright torch, and a casement ope at night, to let the warm Love in !' Such is John Keats at the summit of his powers, and his faults lie lightly upon him—the faults of sentiment due to the early influence of Leigh Hunt (1784–1859), the irrepressibly cheerful sciolist of a Radical and Romantic type, and the faults of sense which may be traced, as he traces them himself, to the fact that he 'would sooner fail than not be among the greatest'.



Born in 1792 and dying in 1822, the senior of Keats by three years and his survivor by one, Percy Bysshe Shelley, too, is one of the 'inheritors of unfulfilled renown'. And, appropriately enough, it is the contemporary poet who in June, 1821, composed a most moving 'elegy on the death of John Keats', whom he was so soon to follow—by a boating accident off Spezzia—to an early grave. The roll of literature contains no two records so similar in the brilliancy of achievement and the brevity of the time allotted to it. Neither lived to be thirty, and almost within a single decade—the second of the nineteenth century—Keats and Shelley alike won immortal fame. 'It is my intention', declared Shelley in his Preface to *Adonais*, the name which he gave to Keats in this elegy, 'to subjoin a criticism upon the claims of its lamented object to be classed among the writers of the highest genius who have adorned our age'; and, in the event, *Adonais* serves a double purpose: it exalts the doomed poet who wrote and the dead poet of whom it is written:

He is a portion of the loveliness  
Which once he made more lovely. . . .

The inheritors of unfulfilled renown  
Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought,  
Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton  
Rose pale—his solemn agony had not  
Yet faded from him; Sidney, as he fought  
And as he fell, and as he lived and loved,  
Sublimely mild, a Spirit without spot,  
Arose, and Lucan, by his death approved. . . .

The One remains, the many change and pass;  
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity,  
 Until Death tramples it to fragments. . . .

The breath whose spirit I have invoked in song  
 Descends on me ; my spirit's bark is driven,  
 Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given ;  
 The massy earth and spheréd skies are riven !  
 I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar ;  
 Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

Shelley's strength lies in his music far more than in his thought, and his best work is to be sought in the occasional lyric poems in which the mere words which he uses melt and are fused in the sound of the melody they contrive to make. The sound of the melody thus made is so potent in its magic that it wins its way to our emotions without affecting our senses : it is not till the emotions have been stirred by these melodies transcending language that the words which compose them carry a meaning. We listen with our feelings before we listen with our ears :

O world ! O life ! O time !  
 On whose last steps I climb,  
     Trembling at that where I had stood before ;  
 When will return the glory of your prime ?  
     No more—oh, never more !

Out of the day and night  
 A joy has taken flight ;  
     Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,  
 Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight  
     No more—Oh, never more !

It is in the sound, not the meaning, that the magic of these words resides. They are subtly

combined to produce the utmost effect from their disposition and arrangement. The ten lines have only three sound-endings, -ime, -ore, and -ight, and of these three two have a broad -i- and the third a broad -o- sound. Then the -o- sound is anticipated twelve times before it is definitely repeated in the second 'never more' of the first stanza, and it occurs again in the next stanza in 'out', 'joy', 'hoar', and 'move' before the 'no more' passes it on to the final 'Oh, never more'. Similarly the -i- sound is reduplicated, and the chief vowel variant in the second stanza is the broad -a- in da-, ta-, fa-, and in the kindred -ar- sound of 'heart'. The broad sounds fall to slow movement, and the quickened music brings with it the short -e- of 'trem-', 'where', 'be-', 'fresh', '-er', '-er', the short -a- of 'at', 'that', 'had', 'and', 'and', and the short -i- of '-ling', 'spring', and 'win-'.

Shelley, no doubt, was not conscious of this process in his use of words. He did not deliberately construct a lyrical poem of ten lines out of three or four sounds combined to stir men's emotions. He neither laid a plan for this effect, nor analysed it backwards as we have done. He was more than half a musician, dependent solely on harmonies of sound, and language appealed to him first by its power of rhythm and notes. Take these two stanzas again :

One word is too often profaned  
For me to profane it,  
One feeling too falsely disdained  
For thee to disdain it ;  
One hope is too like despair  
For prudence to smother,  
And pity from thee too dear  
Than that from another.

I can give not what men call love,  
 But wilt thou accept not  
 The worship the heart lifts above  
 And the Heavens reject not—  
 The desire of the moth for the star,  
 Of the night for the morrow,  
 The devotion of something afar  
 From the sphere of our sorrow ?

This sound-effect is less analysable, because, even more than the first example, it pervades the whole poem. The sound-repetitions are obvious ; the very words are repeated as well as their consonants and vowels : but beyond the rhyme and the alliteration, there is a music in the poet's song which defies critical analysis. As Shelley said of the skylark, so his readers may well-nigh say of him :

What thou art we know not ;  
 What is most like thee ?  
 From rainbow clouds there flow not  
 Drops so bright to see  
 As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

Something may be said, however, of the fire at which his light was kindled. We have already spoken of the French Revolution as an almost personal influence on the literature of its age. Shortly, indeed, we shall see how very personally it affected the active life of William Wordsworth, who was a young man in Paris before Keats or Shelley was born. Coleridge and Southey, again, in the summer of 1794, dreamed of establishing a new world on a foundation of natural law. This Pantisocracy, as they called it, the Realm of Universal Equality, was abandoned for lack of funds, and the same unromantic necessity brought Wordsworth from France and, possibly, from the fate of

the revolutionists which he was ready to share. All this and much else of minor value,—the propaganda of the Norwich Unitarians, including Dr Aikin and his sister Mrs Barbauld; the Lunar Society at Birmingham, with Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Priestley, and other leaders of industry and science; the Liverpool group, with William Roscoe, and the school of advanced thought in London, with Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), painter and critic, and William Godwin (1756-1836), demagogue and novelist, who became the father-in-law of Shelley—came a few years earlier than the work of Shelley and Keats. These could not take a part in revolution, but they could and did succeed in asserting their share in the ideas for which revolution stood. To Shelley's bright and happy spirit, untroubled, like Keats, by want of health or by the worse want of sympathy, the appeal of these ideas was irresistible. He demanded joy from life, the right of joy for all God's creatures. Again and again it recurs in the closed volume of his poems, this insistent demand for the inheritance of man, this passion, riotous at times, for the liberty of joy. As the French revolutionaries asked to be released from the tyrant's yoke, so the poets whom their influence inspired, not in England alone, transferred this demand to the things of the spiritual life, and sought in nature the sanction which human history had misread :

True Love in this differs from gold and clay,  
That to divide is not to take away. . . .  
If you divide pleasure, and love, and thought,  
Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not



How much, while any yet remains unshared,  
 Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared :  
 This truth is that deep well, whence sages draw  
 The unenvied light of hope ; the eternal law  
 By which those live, to whom this world of life  
 Is as a garden ravaged.

*Epipsychidion.*

The day becomes more solemn and serene  
 When noon is past, there is a harmony  
 In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,  
 Which through the summer is not heard or seen.  
 Thus let thy power, which like the truth  
 Of nature or my passive youth  
 Descended, to my sunward life supply  
 Its calm—to one who worships thee  
 And every form containing thee,  
 Whom, spirit fair, thy spells did bind  
 To fear himself, and love all human kind.

*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.*

The secret strength of things  
 Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome  
 Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits thee !  
 And what wert thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,  
 If to the human mind's imaginings  
 Silence and solitude were vacancy ?

*Mont Blanc.*

For love, and beauty, and delight  
 There is no death nor change : their might  
 Exceeds our organs, which endure  
 No light, being themselves obscure.

*The Sensitive Plant.*

Come thou, but lead out of the inmost cave  
 Of man's deep spirit, as the morning-star  
 Beckons the sun from the Eoan wave,  
 Wisdom. I hear the pennons of her car  
 Self-moving, like cloud charioted by flame ;  
 Comes she not, and come ye not,  
 Rulers of eternal thought,  
 To judge, with solemn truth, life's ill-apportioned lot ?

Blind love, and equal Justice, and the Fame  
 Of what has been, the Hope of what will be ?

O Liberty ! if such could be thy name  
Wert thou disjoin'd from these, or they from thee :  
If thine or theirs were treasures to be bought  
By blood or tears \*, have not the wise and free  
Wept tears, and blood like tears ?

*Ode to Liberty.*

It is from passages like these that the reader gathers Shelley's message, if other message be required than the music of his verse.

IN honoured poverty thy voice did weave  
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,  
Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,  
Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.

A stern, even a solemn rebuke. The lines occur at the conclusion of a sonnet from Shelley to Wordsworth, composed in 1816, when the writer was twenty-four years old and the subject of his verse was six-and-forty. A few months before, in October, 1815, Francis Jeffrey had said of Wordsworth in *The Edinburgh Review*, 'This [*The White Doe of Rylstone*] has the merit of being the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted'. A year earlier, in the same review, the same critic had declared of the same poet, 'This [*The Excursion*] will never do ! . . . The case of Mr Wordsworth, we perceive, is now manifestly hopeless, and we give him up as altogether incurable, and . . . as finally lost to the good cause of poetry'.

Who, we may ask, was the poet, and of what stuff was his poetry made, whom the critics combined to crush ? ; whom Shelley, the boy-poet, ardent, generous, aspiring, reproached with the

\* Cp. the quotation from George Meredith, p. 392 below.

crime of deserting the cause of liberty and truth ? ; whom Jeffrey, the leading reviewer, awake to the promise which was Keats, declared to be finally lost to the good cause of poetry ? Wordsworth, at twice Shelley's age, and with more than twice his experience, was competent to have acted as his mentor and guide ; Wordsworth, entering middle-age, with his masterpieces published and his theories of poetics behind him, might expect to have been treated at least with ordinary respect. Yet Shelley despairs of his principles, and Jeffrey despairs of his practice.

It is well to approach the consideration of ' how to read ' Wordsworth aright with these sentences ringing in our ears. In the next chapter we shall attempt to justify our belief that, of all poets who have sustained the ' good cause ' of liberty in song, of all imaginative writers who, crossing the boundary-line of sense-perception, have sought to express in language—and, therefore in verse—the revelation of the truth of faith, Wordsworth is the noblest and the most enduring, and Wordsworth's genius is the greatest. Here let us remember that in late middle life he was accounted lost to poetry, lost to liberty and truth, the ' lost leader ' of a later poet's rebuke \*. And here, if Words-

\* We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,  
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,  
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,  
Made him our pattern to live and to die !  
Shakspeare was of us, Milton was for us,  
Burns, Shelley were with us—they watch from their  
graves !

He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,  
—He alone sinks to the rear of the slaves !

ROBERT BROWNING (1812-89), *The Lost Leader*.

worth be admitted to the rare companionship of the great, abandoning the comparative degrees which are inappropriate to Parnassus, by all means let him enter, crowned, not with laurel, but with thorns. The bay came later, as men know. Tennyson, in 1851, the successor to Wordsworth in the Poet Laureateship, wrote that Queen Victoria's

Royal grace  
To one of less desert allows  
This laurel greener from the brows  
Of him who utter'd nothing base,

and the modest sentiment, so smoothly turned, is a fit beginning to the forty-two years during which Lord Tennyson was laureate. And if the memory of Wordsworth's tenure of that office survives chiefly in the eulogy of his successor, it is the office, not the poet, that is forgotten. The thorns which his critics bound upon him—the dispraise of Jeffrey and his kin, the disdain of Shelley and of Browning—are more worthy in men's eyes than the bay which his successor made illustrious.

We may conclude this chapter with a reference to Robert Southey (1774-1843), Poet Laureate for thirty years, but better remembered perhaps to-day as the writer of a *Life of Nelson*, as a *Quarterly* reviewer and biographer and editor of Cowper, and as the author of several miscellaneous commonplace books.

A more stormy spirit of the times was George Gordon, sixth Lord Byron (1788-1824), whose 'Byronic' note has become famous as a moral as well as a poetic epithet, and whose influence, as 'der Byronismus' or 'le Byronisme', has been

a considerable force in German and French literature. The glamour of his brief career as a schoolboy at Harrow, as an extravagant undergraduate at Cambridge, as the swimmer of the Hellespont, as a patron of the stage, as a lover, and, finally, as a volunteer in the cause of the Greek insurgents, which led to his death at Missolonghi in April, 1824—all this lent for many years a somewhat exaggerated value to his wild and musical verse, of which *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan* are the best-known pieces. As the author of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), Byron took a leading part in the disputatious criticism of his age, but it is obvious to-day that he very imperfectly understood the forces that were at work in current literature\*. Another important name in the literary history of these years is that of Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864), the author of *Imaginary Conversations*, and of certain poetic epigrams in which he was able to display his ripe love of Greek learning. But the multiplication of names, as the diffusion of talent increases, is of less significance to our purpose than the unity of aim which is dimly traceable in literature. This came to completest expression among post-Revolution writers in the life-work of Wordsworth, to whose deliberate and austere muse we now accordingly turn.

\* Byron's *Works* have recently been elaborately republished by Mr Murray—*Poetry*, 7 vols., edited by E. H. Coleridge; *Letters*, 6 vols., edited by R. E. Prothero.



## CHAPTER XVI

### WORDSWORTH

*' Lætitia est hominis transitio ad maiorem perfectionem '*  
SPINOZA

SEVERAL influences went to form William Wordsworth. There was, first, the fortune of his long life—1770 to 1850 ; for, though he could not have foreseen that he was to live through the busy eighty years which included the French Revolution, the Battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo, the Reform Act of 1832, and the movement towards industrial peace culminating in the Great Exhibition of 1851, yet his work was invested with a sense of tranquillity and space, so that expression became a function of design, as if he were confident through all that he would survive to see the rough places made smooth.

Secondly, and with singular insistence, there was the influence of his early surroundings. He was born at Cockermouth, in Cumberland, and was educated at the grammar-school at Hawkshead. His undergraduate career at St John's College did not impress him deeply, and from Cambridge he went on a series of tours in France and Germany. Thence he came back before the century's end with an obvious motion of relief. He settled at Grasmere in 1799, setting up house with Dorothy, his sister, and, three years later,

Mary Hutchinson, his wife joined the idyllic ménage. Children and friends arrived, and in 1813 Wordsworth moved his household to Rydal Mount, Grasmere, where, like a poet in a fairy-tale, he lived till he died. He is buried in Grasmere churchyard. Thus, of his eighty years hardly a dozen were spent away from the hills and dales of Westmorland and Cumberland. Within the area of that influence his susceptibility and his associative faculties put forth the fulness of their powers.

Thirdly, we have to reckon with the influence of the few years spent abroad. He was in France in 1790, just before he took his degree, and again in 1792 in the year after that event. The direction of his talents was uncertain at that date. It was even uncertain if they would lead him to action or to reflection, the great parallel roads along which character acts upon experience. Michel Beaupuy (1755-1796), a Republican general and a paladin of the Revolution, whose soldierly chivalry and political idealism recall from his early grave the qualities of our English hero, Gordon (1833-1885), proved an inspiring force. Freedom dwells in hilly countries, for tyranny requires straight roads and an uninterrupted view for its swift blows and constant espial, and the hill-bred lad of two-and-twenty took fire at Beaupuy's example—his first contact with reality. There was a rumour of a risk that Wordsworth would join the revolutionaries. His guardians—for his parents had died young—became angry and alarmed, and Wordsworth had to come home. He stopped in London on his way, to be near the

centre, if not at it, and the *Descriptive Sketches* in eighteenth century heroic couplets which he published at this date hardly reassured his uncles as to the future of their charge. To Wordsworth, however, it was clear. The seed had fallen on ready soil. He wrote in prose *An Apology for the French Revolution*, subsequently called *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, but never published in his lifetime. Once—and, as it proved, once only, though at an impressionable age—the seer had been a man of action, using his hands as well as his eyes, and prepared, if need be, to back his convictions with his life. Action had invaded contemplation, overflowing its banks with a torrent of vain desire. The influence was ineradicable. The rest of life was to be devoted to a search for the satisfaction of that desire, backwards through thought upon action, to a reconstruction in reason of the faith which facts had disappointed, and thus to a new revelation of the means to human perfection. The means were still to be formulated, but already the end was clear :

My heart was all  
Given to the People, and my love was theirs.  
*Prelude*, ix ('Residence in France'), 123-24.

There was further the influence of Wordsworth's friends. His domestic life was so placid, and his happiness in wife and children was so complete, that there is a tendency to assume that he was incapable of deep feeling on the personal side. There is nothing in his record in the least corresponding to the influence of women on Burns, Shelley or Byron. Female society—for one falls

unconsciously into prosaic speech—held no danger and no lure for the brother and husband of Dorothy and Mary Wordsworth. He moved securely in the protection of the love of two good women, and the sacrifice inseparable from love fell on these rather than on him, and particularly on Dorothy, whose great natural talents were placed freely at her brother's disposal, and whose maimed self-development and long senile decay were, perhaps, a part of the price which she cheerfully paid for his love. But, if passion were wanting, ardour at least was there, and Wordsworth's many allusions to his sister attract us, and rewarded her. His passion for Beaupuy, too, was romantic in its intensity, and was mingled in later life with the poet's sentiment for his sailor-brother, John, who had been drowned in command of his ship. In 1795 a friendship was begun with Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), which was deep enough to suffer estrangement for a period of two years, and which was the fastest element in the brotherhood known to subsequent critics as the school of 'Lake Poets'. To the peaceful home in the Quantocks came Charles Lamb (1775-1834), Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867) writer of the *Diary* and a founder of The Athenaeum club, Robert Southey (1774-1843) Mrs Coleridge's brother-in-law, Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859) of the *Confessions of an Opium-Eater*, Joseph Cottle of Bristol, publisher, and John Thelwall (1764-1834), social reformer and 'Friend of the People', who achieved imprisonment in the Tower. An echo of Wordsworth's French experience is found in the fact that the presence of Thelwall

at these gatherings and the local gossip they provoked caused a Government spy to be sent down. Sir George Beaumont, a Leicestershire magnate, was another of Wordsworth's friends whose pictures and lands formed topics for some of his verse, and twice in thirty years Wordsworth visited Scott in Scotland.

It was in Coleridge's company that the Wordsworths spent a winter in Germany, 1798-99, and though they seem to have been received by no one of importance save Klopstock (1724-1803), the poet, German influence on Wordsworth requires a few words at this point. Germany, more fortunate than France, was spared at this date the harsh experience of revolution, yet her thought was equally susceptible to revolutionary strivings and ideas, and it appealed at many points to Wordsworth's contemplative mood. German philosophy in Kant (1724-1804) and Hegel (1770-1831), and German criticism in Winkelman (1717-1768) and Lessing (1729-1781), added the ballast of an historical sense to conclusions which might have become vapid; and, where thought passed into letters, as in Goethe's philosophic drama, *Faust*, and in Schiller's historical plays, nature became articulated, national types were created, and the pantheistic and cosmopolitan streams of thought were diverted into particularistic channels. All this had its influence on Wordsworth. It has been well pointed out that the famous line in Savage Landor's famous epigram, 'Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art', contains by implication an account of the tendency of the Romantic movement, traceable, among others,



in Wordsworth. Thus, in 1798, Wordsworth composed a poem on the subject of Tintern Abbey in which the Abbey itself is never mentioned. Nine years later he composed a poem about Bolton Abbey in which the art interest of the Abbey is again completely subordinate, while thirteen years later again he composed his beautiful sonnets on the architecture of King's College Chapel \*. Thus, it may be said of Wordsworth that he loved Nature first and Art next to Nature—first, the soul of the world, the *anima mundi* of the old transcendentalists, and next to this mystic beauty, so difficult to grasp, the souls of particular things imitated from divine patterns by human hands. Partly this development belongs to the peculiar genius of Wordsworth, which crystallized and hardened as the poet grew older. His aging

\* I owe the hint of this excellent illustration to Prof. Herford's *The Age of Wordsworth*, p. xx (G. Bell, 1897), but I may, perhaps, likewise refer to my own *Primer of Wordsworth*, pp. 137-140 (Methuen, 1897), where the same argument is elaborated. *Wordsworth*, by Mr F. W. H. Myers, in the 'English Men of Letters' series (Macmillan) is admirable in every way, but perhaps the best short piece of Wordsworth-criticism yet composed is Walter Pater's essay in *Appreciations* (Macmillan). Matthew Arnold's, in *Essays in Criticism* (Second Series) is more renowned, but less ripe in intuitional judgment. Leslie Stephen (*Hours in a Library*, Smith, Elder, vol. II, 1899) has a fine and discriminating paper on *Wordsworth's Ethics*, and more recently Prof. W. Raleigh's monograph, *Wordsworth* (Arnold, 1903), is suggestive and sound. *La Jeunesse de Wordsworth*, by Prof. Emile Legouis, a study of *The Prelude*, appeared in Paris (Masson) in 1896, and is a classical piece of criticism. Messrs Dent have issued an English version, and it was reviewed by Sir Leslie Stephen in *The National Review*, February, 1897. There is an excellent *Wordsworth* in the 'Oxford Edition' of the poets (Frowde, 1904).

faculties seemed to settle on the concrete images which illustrated the general imaginings of his youth. His thought became more definite and orthodox, and his style more rigid and correct. Instead of the worshipping the soul of the river-god, he wrote sonnets to *The River Duddon*; instead of justifying worship in the abstract, he wrote *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*. But partly the change corresponds to the transition of the Romantic idea from Rousseau in France to Goethe in Germany.

Time, the great master in perspective, has dealt leniently with Wordsworth. He required the action of a century to soften his austerities, and to add the lights and shadows to the rugged outline of his work. His own contemporaries judged him by eighteenth century standards. We, who inherit the discoveries, the achievements and the disappointments of another hundred years, apply, by no merit of our own, a more intelligent measure, and appreciate, as his contemporaries could not, the singleness of aim and forwardness of design which governed his thought throughout. In a sense, time has been too gentle. Till Professor Legouis reminded us that Wordsworth had a youth \*, we were tending to forget that the reminiscence of the Transatlantic man of letters, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), was not a complete picture of the poet. Emerson, who visited him in 1833, saw 'a plain, elderly, white-haired man, not prepossessing, and disfigured by green goggles. . . . Wordsworth honoured himself by his simple adherence to truth, and was very willing not to

\* See last note.

shine ; but he surprised by the hard limits of his thought'. Against this picture may be set four lines from an early poem, *To a Highland Girl at Inversneyde* (1803) :

With no restraint, but such as springs  
From quick and eager visitings  
Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach  
Of thy few words of English speech

—there are no 'hard limits' in that vision. Of Chatterton, Keats, Shelley we may say : time has drawn the sting of death ; for who knows how an Emerson would have found them in late middle-age, if death had not crowned their youth with the quality of undying ? Wordsworth's youth, in a sense, was less fortunate. The mild, tame, self-centred, broody, opinionated, old man whom years of domestic placidity and withdrawal from politics had fashioned in 1833 out of Michel Beaupuy's hero-worshipper, is not the author of *The Excursion* or of the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality* or of any of the great poems which were completed thirty years before. These were rather the work of the slim, eager lad who caused disquietude to his uncles and stood within the circle of the guillotine, of the fiery young reformer who talked with Coleridge and Southey of a State of All the Liberties on the Susquehanna, of the disciple who acknowledged the sway of Shelley's magniloquent father-in-law, of the democrat before democracy, who

saw, in rudest men,  
Self-sacrifice the firmest ; generous love,  
And continence of mind, and sense of right,  
Uppermost in the midst of fiercest strife.

Oh, sweet it is, in academic groves,  
 Or such retirement, Friend ! as we have known  
 In the green dales besides our Rotha's stream,  
 To ruminate, with interchange of talk,  
 On rational liberty, and hope in man,  
 Justice and peace. But far more sweet such toil—  
 Toil, say I, for it leads to thoughts abstruse—  
 If nature then be standing on the brink  
 Of some great trial, and we hear the voice  
 Of one devoted, one whom circumstance  
 Hath called upon to embody his deep sense  
 In action.

*The Prelude, ix, 386-402.*

And again, for Wordsworth's shorter poems illustrate his longer ones, as 'the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses' illustrate, to use his own comparison, the 'ante-chapel and body of a Gothic church' :

Who is the Happy Warrior ? Who is he  
 That every man in arms should wish to be ? . . .  
 'T is he whose law is reason ; who depends  
 Upon that law as on the best of friends ; . . .  
 Whose powers shed round him in the common strife  
 Or mild concerns of ordinary life,  
 A constant influence, a peculiar grace ;  
 But who, if he be called upon to face  
 Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined  
 Great issues, good or bad for human kind,  
 Is happy as a Lover, and attired  
 With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired.

*Character of the Happy Warrior.*

Wordsworth's own text is in places an index to his character-development, and its psychology repays study. Thus, in 1805, he wrote his *Elegiac Stanzas* 'suggested by a picture of *Peele Castle in a Storm*, painted by his friend, Sir George Beaumont'. In the sixty lines of the poem, which is among the most beautiful that he wrote,

Wordsworth recalls his own early impressions of the castle. He had seen it every day for four weeks one summer,

and all the while  
Thy form was sleeping on a glassy sea.

It was to this aspect of the scene that the poet had been accustomed, and, save for intervening experience, this is how he would have had it represented ; this would have been the true picture, if he had painted it at that time. But meanwhile, Captain Wordsworth had been drowned, and the truth of the sea in the poet's vision has to be reconsidered, in accordance with the changed conditions. Not only its peace but its storm, not 'merely silent Nature's breathing life' but 'the lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves' become a part of the revelation : for

I have submitted to a new control :  
A power is gone which nothing can restore ;  
A deep distress hath humanized my soul.

Not for a moment would I now behold  
A smiling sea, and be what I have been :  
The feeling of my loss will ne'er be old ;  
This, which I know, I speak with mind serene.

Sorrow's humanizing power, though it expel for ever the first radiance of observation, though it destroy the mood in which, as Wordsworth records,

I could have fancied that the mighty Deep  
Was even the gentlest of all gentle things,

cannot rob the strong man of his equanimity.



The 'mind serene' is restored under new conditions of serenity :

Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone,  
Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind !  
Such happiness, wherever it be known,  
Is to be pitied ; for 't is surely blind.

But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,  
And frequent sights of what is to be borne !  
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here—  
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

Our examination of these stanzas, so characteristic of Wordsworth, and of the tranquillizing process by which he repaired his faith and enlarged his capacity for the reception of truth, has led us away from our criticism of the text itself. The fourth stanza, as we have it, and as the poet wrote it in 1805, is as follows :

Ah ! then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,  
To express what then I saw ; and add the gleam,  
The light that never was, on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.

These lines come straight from that region of dream-consciousness or of imagination, however we choose to term the mystery that we cannot explore, which is illumined by the light of a higher truth-revelation than that of the senses or of the speculative reason. But Wordsworth in 1820 had ceased to see by this light. Like the prophet of old, he had gone up into the cloud-girt mountain, and when he came down with his message the skin of his face shone. But the light faded ; faded slowly, as he walked through the plain of years ; and when he took up this poem, he distrusted his earlier vision. We can see between the words of

his revision the aging poet's fumbling fear of the bright ghost of his own youth. It is as though he went round on crutches a gulf which he had leapt as a boy. So he re-wrote this stanza in 1820,

Ah ! then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,  
To express what then I saw ; and add a gleam,  
The lustre known to neither sea nor land,  
But borrowed from the youthful Poet's dream.

No less sympathetic study will account for the uninspired change, which, happily, Wordsworth was well advised to alter back to the original text in 1832.

The psychology of the poet's text in this example assists us in his poetry as a whole. He cared little or nothing for expression as an end in itself. His interest lay in the expression of ideas. He is sometimes less than lucid, and at other times less than musical : he is never less than full of thought. And the thought to which his life-work was devoted, as far as its personal element is concerned, was woven of the threads which we have traced at the opening of this chapter, while its universal element consists in that search for the unifying truth beneath the diversities of experience, which, in multiple shapes, was the ambition of the age. No better key can be offered to unlock the treasury of Wordsworth's poems—they occupy 900 pages of about 90 lines each in the 'Oxford Edition'—than Wordsworth suggested of his own accord in his preface to *The Excursion*. This epic poem without an action in about 9,000 lines of blank verse was designed as 'the second part of a long and laborious Work,

which is to consist of three parts'. The complete work was to be entitled *The Recluse*, and *The Prelude*, written between 1799 and 1805, and published posthumously in 1850, was preparatory to it. 'When the Author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. . . . The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself'. This is Wordsworth's account of *The Prelude*; or, *The Growth of a Poet's Mind*; an Autobiographical Poem in fourteen books, of which the titles—Childhood, School-time, Residence at Cambridge, Summer Vacation, Books, Residence in London, Love of Nature leading to Love of Man, Residence in France, Imagination and Taste, etc.—are an index to their contents. *The Prelude* was a kind of prolonged and peculiarly conscientious invocation—an appeal, not to visionary muses, but to the powers and faculties of the poet who desired to employ them for great ends.

The result of the invocation was encouraging. It gave rise, as the preface informs us, to Wordsworth's 'determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature and Society: and to be entitled *The Recluse*; as having for its principal subject the sensations and

opinions of a poet living in retirement'. Part II of *The Recluse* is *The Excursion*, as now extant in nine books; Part III was only planned, and Book i of Part I was left in manuscript by the poet and first printed as recently as 1888. From the conclusion of this book, however, Wordsworth quoted in his preface to *The Excursion* (1814) the last 107 lines, deeming them 'acceptable as a kind of Prospectus of the design and scope of the whole poem'; and it is to these lines that we referred as a key to unlock his treasures.

They open with Milton's aspiration (*Paradise Lost*, Bk. vii), 'fit audience let me find, though few', for the ensuing theme 'On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life':

Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,  
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;  
Of blessed consolations in distress;  
Of moral strength, and intellectual power;  
Of joy in widest commonalty spread;  
Of the individual Mind that keeps her own  
Inviolate retirement, subject there  
To Conscience only, and the law supreme  
Of that Intelligence which governs all—  
I sing.

The theme is lofty and comprehensive, and its divisions should be remembered, especially, perhaps, that bold imagining 'of joy in widest commonalty spread'. But the poet, however conscious of the height of his ambition—for no natural terror, he tells us,

can breed such fear and awe  
As fall upon us often when we look  
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man,  
My haunt, and the main region of my song—

is not daunted by the prospect. The preparatory

*Prelude* had been completed. He had tested his own qualifications, and was humbly satisfied as to his powers. And, for the rest, beauty waits upon his steps :

Paradise, and groves  
Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old  
Sought in the Atlantic main—why should they be  
A history only of departed things,  
Or a mere fiction of what never was ?  
For the discerning intellect of Man,  
When wedded to this goodly universe  
In love and holy passion, shall find these  
A simple produce of the common day.

This is the message of Wordsworth, made vocal and audible in its passage from dumb Earth to deaf Man ; and I, declares the great interpreter,

I, long before the blissful hour arrives,  
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse  
Of this great consummation.

So George Meredith (b. 1828) has sung in more passionate measure,

Love born of knowledge, love that gains  
Vitality as Earth it mates,  
The meaning of the Pleasures, Pains,  
The Life, the Death, illuminates.  
For love we Earth, then serve we all ;  
Her mystic secret then is ours.

*The Thrush in February.*

The 'high argument' of *The Recluse* (*The Excursion*) is to proclaim

How exquisitely the individual Mind  
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less  
Of the whole species) to the external World  
Is fitted : and how exquisitely too—  
Theme this but little heard of among men—  
The external World is fitted to the Mind,

and this argument of reconciliation between the



perplexities of experience and the destiny of man and his race—an argument sustained, as has been said, not by reference to a paradise lost nor to a remote elysium, but ‘by words which speak of nothing more than what we are’—is the product of that trained and reasoned faith, seemingly shattered in France, which Wordsworth painfully reconstructed in his years of communion with Nature. The process was not easy. He had to see

ill sights  
Of madding passions mutually inflamed ;

he had to hear

Humanity in fields and groves  
Pipe solitary anguish ;

he had to hang

Brooding above the fierce confederate storm  
Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore  
Within the walls of cities,

even as Meredith, interpreting Earth’s message, tells us

Accept, she says ; it is not hard  
In woods ; but she in towns  
Repeats, accept ; and have we wept,  
And have we quailed with fears,  
Or shrunk with horrors, sure reward  
We have whom knowledge crowns ;  
Who see in mould the rose unfold,  
The soul through blood and tears.

*Outer and Inner.*

And to the elder as to the younger poet these signs of apparent irreconcilability between the World and the Mind, between the Outer and the Inner, brought no diminution of faith. ‘May these sounds’, cries Wordsworth,

Have their authentic comment ; that, even these  
Hearing, I be not downcast or forlorn.

. . . . Upon me bestow

A gift of genuine insight. . . .

May my Life

Express the image of a better time,  
More wise desires, and simpler manners. Nurse  
My heart in genuine freedom : all pure thoughts  
Be with me ; so shall thy unfailing love  
Guide, and support, and cheer me to the end.

And it is in no lower mood that Wordsworth's poetry must be approached.

We have purposely compared it with the work of a later master in order to show how his footsteps were set in forward places. There has been too strong a tendency to take fright at these mazes of blank verse, and to lose sight of Wordsworth's footprints in the windings of his own *Excursion*. The vital meaning of his message has been insufficiently apprehended, and perhaps the more obvious beauties and the more direct appeal of Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) have tended to the neglect of the more rugged and the more uncompromising writers, who—Wordsworth at the beginning and Meredith in the middle of the nineteenth century—sought, each according to the degree of enlightenment in his age, to irradiate the dark of thought, and to render, as plainly as he could by the imperfect instrument of language, the truth of conduct revealed by faith identified with reason. All this may occupy us later. Here it is appropriate to employ the citations made above in order to point out the essential unity in Wordsworth's plan. He wrote this voluminous Part II of his comprehensive epic of the mind, with its conscientious preparatory poem in the Thirteen

Books of *The Prelude* ; he wrote 'lyrical ballads' of a type of simplicity so inartificial as almost 'to seem to evade the difficulties of art' \* ; and

\* Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), *Discourses to Art Students* (Routledge, Universal Library, pp. 123-24), wrote before Wordsworth's appearance : ' When Simplicity, instead of being a corrector, seems to set up for herself, . . . such an ostentatious display of simplicity becomes then as disagreeable and nauseous as any other kind of affectation. . . . It is in art as in morals : no character would inspire us with an enthusiastic admiration of his virtue, if that virtue consisted only in an absence of vice. . . . Simplicity, when so very inartificial as to seem to evade the difficulties of art, is a very suspicious virtue '. Wordsworth's cultivation of simplicity in his 'lyrical ballads' proceeded from a well-defined plan. Their principal object, he tells us in his Preface of 1798, ' was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men. . . . Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language. . . . My purpose was to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men. . . . Something must have been gained by this practice, but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets. I have also thought it expedient to restrict myself still further, being abstained from the use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad Poets '. The sting of this passage probably lies in the last sentence, which contains a repudiation of the flowers of 'poetic diction' affected in the eighteenth century, and similarly denounced by Keats. Wordsworth's principles of style in poetry were more subversive than his practice proved, which is one reason why we have relegated them to a footnote. His prefaces and essays on this subject contain some of the best work which has ever been written on the theory of poetics ; and, together with the writings of his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, they form an important chapter in the history of English criticism. But occasionally, it

he wrote odes, sonnets, and lyrical poems, as well as shorter narrative pieces, in which he avoided both faults—the excessive mentality of *The Excursion* in its fatiguing diffuseness, and the defective art of his *Lyrical Ballads*, written with Coleridge in 1798, in their unrelieved naturalism. But the point is that, throughout all his writings, one motive was at work. Wordsworth is his own best commentator, and his constant, intense desire to see the particulars of experience by the light, not of sense, but of imagination, and to group them, accordingly, by the laws of their own being and not by the laws of sense-perception—to reason from the intellect to the senses and not, as men use, from the senses to the intellect—may be illustrated at this point by some examples. We need hardly repeat how naturally this desire arose from the social conditions of the times, and their action upon thought, and how closely it corresponded to the course of the poet's own development, alike in his native mountains and in the Paris of Robespierre and in the London of Burke.

Take first, then, the line selected specially above, 'Of joy in widest commonalty spread, . . . I sing'. These words are intended to convey the full force of their meaning. In Wordsworth's scheme of the universe, to his impassioned con-

must be admitted, when he thoroughly lived up to his own teaching, he laid himself open to Reynolds's anticipatory rebuke of evading the difficulties of art. The suspicion is unjust, for the inartificial appearance was consciously cultivated and studied; but good intentions do not make good verse, and his display of simplicity is certainly ostentatious in places.

templation of its Creator's design—or of its merely reasonable plan, without theological bias—joy, as a right, was not confined to the monopoly of men. This was the mistake of the revolutionaries. They took too narrow a view of the problem which they sought to solve, and hence their means were inadequate. All the violence they employed, to which Wordsworth, in his period before reflection, would have added his own little strength, terrible as it appeared within the sphere of its activity, was as nothing to the force of the revolution of conduct by which, and by which alone, the desired result could be obtained. It was not enough to make Frenchmen happy ; it was not even enough to make all men happy by grants of franchise and equality ; these were mere palliatives of an evil the roots of which had not been grasped. Equal nature smiled at such expedients, unless those who employed them recognized them, not as ends in themselves, but as means to the common end beyond the confines of one country or of one species of creation. And, starting from the general proposition instead of from the particular instance of its local violation, it is not violence which must be opposed to wrong, but right action which must wait upon true principle. To no less exalted faith had Wordsworth taken recourse when Shelley dared to reproach him with the charge of cowardice and desertion.

We may trace the expression of this faith and the endeavour to prove its sanction up and down the pages of his poems :

The eye—it cannot choose but see ;  
We cannot bid the ear be still ;



Our bodies feel, where'er they be,  
Against or with our will.

Nor less I deem that there are Powers  
Which of themselves our minds impress ;  
That we can feed this mind of ours  
In a wise passiveness.

*Expostulation and Reply.*

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings ;  
Our meddling intellect  
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things :—  
We murder to dissect.

*The Tables Turned.*

The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley, he has viewed ;  
And impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie  
Some random truths he can impart,—  
The harvest of a quiet eye  
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

*A Poet's Epitaph.*

And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes. . . .  
If this belief from heaven be sent,  
If such be Nature's holy plan,  
Have I not reason to lament  
What Man has made of Man ?

*Lines written in Early Spring.*

Alas ! what differs more than Man from Man !  
And whence that difference ? Whence but from himself ?  
For see the universal Race endowed  
With the same upright form ! The sun is fixed,  
And the infinite magnificence of heaven  
Fixed, within reach of every human eye. . . .  
The primal duties shine aloft, like stars,  
The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,  
Are scattered at the feet of Man, like flowers . . .

. . . He whose soul  
 Ponders this true equality, may walk  
 The fields of earth with gratitude and hope ;  
 Yet, in that meditation, will he find  
 Motive to sadder grief, as we have found,  
 Lamenting ancient virtues overthrown,  
 And for the injustice grieving, that hath made  
 So wide a difference between Man and Man.

*The Excursion*, Book ix, 205.

Thus moderated, thus composed, I found  
 Once more in Man an object of delight,  
 Of pure imagination, and of love ;  
 And, as the horizon of my mind enlarged,  
 Again I took the intellectual eye  
 For my instructor, studious more to see  
 Great truths, than touch and handle little ones.  
 Knowledge was given accordingly ; my trust  
 Became more firm in feelings that had stood  
 The test of such a trial ; clearer far  
 My sense of excellence—of right and wrong :  
 The promise of the present time retired  
 Into its true proportion ; sanguine schemes,  
 Ambitious projects, pleased me less ; I sought  
 For present good in life's familiar face,  
 And built thereon my hopes of good to come.

*The Prelude*, Book xiii, 48.

The somewhat pedestrian course of the last extract reminds us that, though our citations might be co-terminous with the limits of Wordsworth's works, so faithfully did he sustain the high purpose which inspired him, we have quoted enough to illustrate his belief in a deeper sanction and a wider distribution of liberty, equality and joy. Sometimes his mood would lead him to associate his thought with historical instances, and we get the magnificent series of patriotic poems, chiefly in sonnet form. The 'Poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty', containing, among others, the stirring sonnets entitled *On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic*

(‘Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee’), *Thoughts of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland* (‘Two Voices are there; one is of the sea, One of the mountains’), *London*, 1802 (‘Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour’, and ‘It is not to be thought of that the flood Of British freedom’, and ‘When I have borne in memory what has tamed Great nations’), constitute a fine poetic plea for the operation in politics of the principles approved by reason.

And sometimes Wordsworth’s mood would lead him to associate his thought with instances, or images, drawn from humble life. His illustration of the moral qualities of *Resolution and Independence* is derived in the poem of that name from a chance meeting with an old man who pursued the lost trade of a leech-gatherer. Wordsworth had been following a train of reflection which suggested the beautiful line ‘by our own spirits are we deified’, when suddenly

Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven,  
I saw a Man before me unawares :  
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs. . . .

And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,  
Upon the margin of that moorish flood,  
Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,

—a curious figure, perhaps, to associate with consolation for ‘mighty poets in their misery dead’; and yet ‘the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor’ became for Wordsworth the type of resolution independent of circumstances. So, too, in the longer poem, *Peter Bell*, the conversion of insensible humanity to the motions of its higher

nature is typified in the story of a common hawker of pottery.

Sometimes, again, Wordsworth's mood led him to associate his thought with shapes hardly tangible at all. The vanishing greeting in *Stepping Westward*,

'Twas a sound  
Of something without place or bound ;  
And seemed to give me spiritual right  
To travel through that region bright ;

the song of *The Solitary Reaper*,

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.  
Will no one tell me what she sings ?—  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
From old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago ;

the various 'Lucy' poems, which celebrate less a living Lucy than the ideal qualities of

A Creature not too bright and good  
For human nature's daily food ; . . .  
A perfect woman, nobly planned,  
To warn, to comfort, and command ;  
And yet a spirit still, and bright  
With something of angelic light.

(1804)

The stars of midnight shall be dear  
To her ; and she shall lean her ear  
In many a secret place  
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,  
And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face.

(1799)

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be ;  
But she is in her grave, and, oh,  
The difference to me !

(1799) ;

the 'golden daffodils' which

Flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude ;

the revelation on *An Evening of Extraordinary Splendour* :

Long as god-like wish, or hope divine,  
Informs my spirit, ne'er can I believe  
That this magnificence is wholly thine !  
From worlds not quickened by the sun  
A portion of the gift is won ;

—these are a few among the instances in which Wordsworth's thought, like his own skylark,

Type of the wise who soar, but never roam,  
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home,

achieves a consecration of the commonplace, and gives, even for ordinary men and in every-day occurrences, a transcendental interpretation to experience.

And sometimes, detaching himself from 'Home', and abandoning the clinging commonplace, Wordsworth soars on the wings of this interpretative faculty into the free 'Heaven' of transcendental thought. He pauses a moment on an abstraction, like Duty :

Stern Lawgiver ! yet thou dost wear  
The Godhead's most benignant grace ;  
Nor know we anything so fair  
As is the smile upon thy face :  
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,  
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;  
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,  
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong.

He avails himself for a moment of the authority



lent to moral precept by an old classical tradition :

The Gods approve  
 The depth, and not the tumult of the soul ; . . .  
 And thou, though strong in love, art all too weak  
 In reason, in self-government too slow ;  
 I counsel thee by fortitude to seek  
 Our blest re-union in the shades below.  
 The invisible world with thee hath sympathized ;  
 Be thy affections raised and solemnized.  
 Learn, by a mortal yearning, to ascend—  
 Seeking a higher object. Love was given,  
 Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end \*.

He points the moral he has sought in the pivotal piece of all his poetry, which he required his editors to set like a cornerstone of the building—the great *Ode ; Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* :

Not for these I raise  
 The song of thanks and praise ;  
 But for those obstinate questionings  
 Of sense and outward things,  
 Fallings from us, vanishings ; . . .  
 But for those first affections,  
 Those shadowy recollections,  
 Which, be they what they may,  
 Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,  
 Are yet a master-light of all our seeing ;  
 Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make  
 Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
 Of the eternal silence. . . .  
 Thanks to the human heart by which we live  
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,  
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

But, though he could arrest this transcendental note in the blowing of a flower, or the passing of

\* From Wordsworth's *Laodamia*.

a wind, or even in the stillness of the spaces of earth, or sky, or sea, Wordsworth's supreme skill was shown in rendering vocal the inexpressible. We remember—from Matthew Arnold's essay—the passionate desire of Joseph Joubert (1754–1824) to endue his ethereal ideas with corporeal language. 'I cannot build a house for my ideas', he cried. 'I have tried to do without words, and words take their revenge on me by their difficulty'. And, again, 'The true science of metaphysics consists not in rendering abstract that which is sensible, but in rendering sensible that which is abstract; apparent, that which is hidden; imaginable, if so may be, that which is only intelligible; and intelligible, finally, that which an ordinary attention fails to seize'\*. And who, save Wordsworth, or, rather, who before him, has solved this difficulty of language, and reached, in poetry, the goal of metaphysics? :

In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world  
Is lightened; that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While, with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things. . . .

. . . I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the Mind of Man. . . .

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\* *Essays in Criticism*, First Series, 'Joubert'.

. . . Therefore am I still  
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
 And mountains ; and of all that we behold  
 From this green earth ; of all the mighty world  
 Of eye and ear,—both what they half-create,  
 And what perceive.

*Tintern Abbey.*

It is for this supreme appeal from the seen to the Unseen, from appearance to Truth, from understanding to Faith, from the inductive to the imaginative Reason, that men go back to William Wordsworth, and humbly accompany the poet through the arid stretches of *The Excursion*. The sojourn in the desert is rewarded by Pisgah-prospects from the heights, and upon those heights he walks securely in the serene light of his impassioned knowledge (*Excursion*, v, 1012) :

Life, I repeat, is energy of love.

Finally, to recur to our original design, how far has poetic England travelled since Chaucer's company of pilgrims surveyed mankind from London to Canterbury, and how far have the barriers been thrust back in the emancipation of the freedom-craving soul. Take the aspiration for England—more remarkable as prophecy than as poetry—from the Ninth Book of *The Excursion*, commencing at line 292, and Wordsworth, we shall see, even in an uninspired passage which provoked Matthew Arnold's sneer at the 'Social Science Congress' frame of mind, reflects in verse the conditions of his age, and assists the instinct of all sentient things to push upwards towards the light. And when, as in the bulk of his writings, the quartz is sifted and transfused, and the pure

ore is extracted, then English literature records another milestone on its road to the perfect expression of complete knowledge. Wordsworth, arresting the sounds of a harmony perfected elsewhere ; Wordsworth, imprisoning the gleams escaped from the mind of the universe, conveys in imperishable language a poetic revelation fuller than any before. In the fine eulogy of Walter Pater (1839-1894), the last humanist in English criticism, ' it is the contact of these thoughts, the speculative boldness in them, which constitutes, at least for some minds, the secret attraction of much of his best poetry—the sudden passage from lowly thoughts and places to the majestic forms of philosophical imagination, the play of these forms over a world so different, enlarging so strangely the bounds of its humble churchyards, and breaking such a wild light on the graves of christened children '.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LAST CHAPTER

'The main element of the modern spirit's life is neither the senses and understanding, nor the heart and imagination: it is the imaginative reason'.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

ONE thing was missing to Wordsworth's survey. Matthew Arnold, who is quoted in the motto prefixed to this chapter, declared in his *Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann'*, Étienne de Sénancour, that

Wordsworth's eyes avert their ken  
From half of human fate,

and the authority of the statement requires that we should ask which half Wordsworth left unseen.

The answer need not be categorical. We need not say, in so many words, 'This he saw', 'This he did not see', nor construct a catalogue of spectacles to prove the justice of Arnold's criticism. Arnold was probably right. In his sixty-six years of life (1822-1888) he passed gravely in review many of his senior contemporaries, and pronounced judgment on the work of Keats, Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, and others. And the judgments he pronounced rested on well-



laid foundations. He discovered two evils in his age, first, an immense self-righteousness in the ranks of the English middle-classes, an impenetrable, smug 'Philistinism', as he taught his generation to call it, which was sturdily opposed to the entrance of new ideas. The 'bright torch' of Keats shone unmarked; the 'casement' was never 'ope at night to let the warm Love in'. Secondly, Arnold discovered an excessive concentration in his times. The cotton-spinners and manufacturers and money-makers never looked up from their toil. We pursue, he told his generation,

Our business with unslackening tide . . .  
And glance, and nod, and bustle by;  
And never once possess our soul  
Before we die.

*A Southern Night.*

His observation of these twin evils, sung by him in elegiac verse in youth, impelled him in later life to a more direct intervention. He wrote brilliant pamphlets on conduct, partly political and partly moral in their scope, of which the most permanently valuable are *Literature and Dogma* (1873) and *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). With these definite views on the state of culture in his own times, and with this definite mission to direct the means of correction, Matthew Arnold was amply qualified to discuss from his own point of view the writings of a poet such as Wordsworth, who had consciously intended to measure experience by the standard of truth. Accordingly, when Arnold tells us that Wordsworth's survey

omitted 'half of human fate', we expect to discover that half supplied out of the riper experience of later poets and seers.

Human fate, or its expression in human thought—and mark that the province of literature has been extended to include all humanity—is commonly discernible by concrete examples. It is convenient to trace its history by successive events, and two such events occurred at the beginning and at the end, respectively, of the ten years after Wordsworth's death. Wordsworth died in 1850. In 1851 Queen Victoria (1819-1901) opened the Great Exhibition of Peace and its works at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham. In 1859 Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published *The Origin of Species*. We may take these two facts as types of that half of human fate from which Wordsworth's eyes were averted. Death excluded them from his knowledge, but his tastes excluded from his purview the tendencies of thought which they severally brought together. And we shall find that these two facts are crucial for the literature of the last chapter, alike in its strength and in its weakness.

Man considering men is the formula which sums up every effort of art-expression. The marbles of Phidias express man considering men's beauty; the ideal of physical beauty wrought to expression by art. The laws of Leviticus express man considering men's holiness; the ideal of sanity wrought in art-forms so consistent as to admit without demur the juxtaposition of the precepts 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed,

neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee' (*Lev. xix, 18, 19*). *The Canterbury Tales* express Chaucer considering a pilgrimage in fourteenth century England; *The Excursion* expresses Wordsworth considering social welfare a few years after the French Revolution. And between the two are the art-forms in literature of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's plays, Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Pope's *Essay on Man*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, Keats's *Endymion*, expressing each in its kind, and according to the conditions of its environment, a message struck out by the contact on fruitful soil of the universal and the particular.

This is preliminary to saying that the Exhibition of 1851 and Darwin's book in 1859 were alike challenges from man to men. The one said: 'War is a mistake. Peace is a practical aim. Free-trade, free intercourse, free institutions, form the sanction and the *raison d'être* of law. Let human history re-commence from this date'. The other said: 'Heaven is a fiction of the theologians. Man adapts himself to earth. Utility is the sanction of conduct. Let human history re-commence from this date'. Thus, the epoch partly associated with the names of Richard Cobden (1804-1865), William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898), Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892)—1809 was the *annus mirabilis*—is an epoch of a new departure which Wordsworth neither lived nor cared to see. Wordsworth in his *Intimations of Immortality* had sung with passionate faith:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy . . .  
Trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our home,

and no Darwinian speculation, whether 'in the air' or not during his lifetime, would have convinced him that we come trailing nothing more distinguished than the unadapted habits of arboreal, quadrumanous ancestors.

Time, perhaps, may prove him right. The problem of origins is not settled—Darwin never pretended that it was—by the facts of physical evolution. It is only helped forward another stage. Like a climber attaining his summit who sees a fresh summit to be attained, the evolutionist philosophy and the great men of 1809 never settled the problems which they set out to solve: they merely supplied fresh evidence for its ultimate solution, fresh material for the new attack. Human thought can never go back on the results of their discoveries. As little can a map of the earth be drawn without reference to the geographical exploration of Columbus, or a chart of the skies without reference to the astronomical discoveries of Copernicus, as a system of philosophy be devised without reference to the biological conclusions of Darwin. These must be taken into account by any future philosopher. He may start where these leave off, correcting or amplifying them, it may be, by the results of further research, but never, as long as the mind of man investigates such problems, suffering under the disability of starting again where Darwin began. Similarly, the Exhibition of 1851 marks an epoch of industrial aspiration. Wars devastating and cruel have



been not infrequent since its doors were set open ; but human speculation on the international conditions of society and commerce can never go back on the accomplished fact of 1851. So much is added for all time to the raw material of thought.

Now, taking these two ideas—and human progress is measured by ideas—the idea of industrial peace as the universal aim of the nations, and the idea of man's responsibility, not to the personal God of the religious warfare of past ages, but to an impersonal tendency of evolutionary ethics, it is obvious that the thoughtful man will have been supplied with fresh points of view for his consideration of men. The points of view commonly known as utilitarian and material will begin to be in vogue. The fear of war will recede ; the tongues of battle will be silenced. The virtues engendered by the old conditions—chivalry, the virtue of the horseman, communicated from knight to squire, readiness, alertness, pliability, and, from the other point of view, awe, reverence, self-sacrifice, humility—will tend to become antiquated, at least in the sight of the earlier apostles of the new gospel. The utilitarian and the materialist will be concerned for the improvement of man's condition on earth, for social legislation, the extension of the franchise, facilities of intercourse, a wider category of necessities—transferring them from luxuries—and, in the moral sphere, happiness arising from prosperity and leisure, self-confidence, contentment, finality.

The clash of views is clear, and it is reflected in literature. The unsettlement of old beliefs and the immoderate exaltation of new ones are



both to be traced. They occur in Tennyson again and again—most directly, perhaps, in his Dedication of *The Idylls of the King*, which he begs Queen Victoria to accept as

New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,

or as mirroring, that is to say, the conflict between the physical philosophers and the theologians. More pertinently, the name of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), author of *A System of Logic*, *Principles of Political Economy*, and treatises on *Liberty*, *Representative Government* and *Utilitarianism*, is conspicuous as a leader of the school of philosophical Radicals whom Gladstone led in active politics; and it is interesting to note in this connection that Mill discovered in Wordsworth's poems 'what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself,' he says, 'at once better and happier as I came under their influence'—a striking testimony to the fact that the practical workers towards democracy were not insusceptible to the democratic ideal painfully sought by Wordsworth out of his own experience. But, apart from this chance meeting over the cradle of the new thought, certain results were inevitable. There was bound to be a wave of atheism, and an even stronger wave of agnosticism, to employ the word coined by T. H. Huxley (1825–1895), whose Romanes lecture at Oxford in 1893 was on 'Evolution and Ethics'. G. J. Romanes himself (1848–1894) was another of the Victorian men of science whose researches in biology and physiology exercised a powerful influ-

ence in remodelling theological beliefs. The era of evolutionary science was bound to react on the imaginative interpretation of the universe, and the distinction—erroneous but very plausible—between science and faith arose, like a dragon in the path, to confuse the pilgrims to Jerusalem.

If Tennyson, as we shall see, stood midway between the two, and attempted an heroic reconciliation, there were other writers in the age whose passion for social reform was tempered by a noble ambition to revive the sentiment and pathos underlying practical affairs. Charles Dickens (1812–1870), John Ruskin (1819–1900) and Sir Walter Besant (1836–1901) were alike animated by this desire, though their work followed different directions. ‘George Eliot’, Mary Ann Cross (1819–1880), the greatest woman-writer of the times, was social reformer as well as novelist; William Morris (1834–1896) was socialist and poet, and George Meredith and Algernon Charles Swinburne, the survivors of the age of giants, display in their diverse kinds some of the virtues and of the vices which are engendered on the battlefield between beauty and utility. Dickens’s gallery of types—Pecksniff, Peggotty, Pickwick, Sarah Gamp, Mr Micawber, and the rest; delightful, universal, immortal—consists of a selection of attributes, clothed in human forms slightly caricatured, and combined in situations designed specially for their display. The unworldly innocence of Mr Pickwick, the less disingenuous impracticality of Mr Micawber, Mrs Jellyby’s uncalculating humanitarianism, Mrs Gamp’s calculating inhumanity, Nicholas Nickleby’s mettlesome hope-

fulness, the elderly chill of Dombey *père*, these types of attributes were employed by the novelist's teeming invention to illustrate the homely truths of conduct. He scattered mirth on his way; his comedy of life provided situations full of irresistible laughter, and there is a hearty tone in his work which dispels, even while it suggests, the underlying pathos of character contradicting circumstances. He believed in the conquest of fate, in sentiment superior to reason, in the reign—riotous it might be—of the heart and the soul over the world of the head. Was there hunger? Let it be fed. Was there nakedness? Let it be clad. Was there cruelty? Let it be hanged. And the Cheerybles, Sam Weller, Tom Pinch, Mr Boffin and the rest were created for the undoing of the Murdstones, the Squeers, the Sykes, and the other types of unavailing evil.

The plate-glass window point of view of the great emporium at Sydenham, the utilitarian aim staring out of the Crystal Palace, was only faintly discernible in Dickens, who, despite his contagious humour and his regard for material prosperity, does not in any sense belong to the 'Philistines' of Matthew Arnold's scorn. On the contrary, his philanthropy, though it spoke with an optimist's voice, was tinged with the pessimist's vision. His comedy, like that of Dante, was the comedy of life, not merely its comic side, and he was deeply moved by the ills which he sought to correct. His crusade in favour of child-training in *Nicholas Nickleby* and in *Oliver Twist* was one among many good causes which inspired his novels with a purpose, and it is here that we mark

his affinity with the independent work of Sir Walter Besant, the majority of whose books were written in partnership with James Rice (1843-1882), but whose own *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* was the direct cause of the foundation of the People's Palace, with its educational aims and history.

Ruskin's serious philanthropy was even more remote from the successful shop-front standard. He even urged on the nation of shop-keepers, as Englishmen were beginning to be called, that 'it is melancholy to think of the time and expense lost in marbling the shop fronts of London alone, and of the waste of our resources in absolute vanities, in things about which no mortal cares, by which no eye is ever arrested, unless painfully, and which do not add one whit to comfort, or cleanliness, or even to that great object of commercial art—conspicuousness'\*. Amid much that is encouraging and inspiring in Ruskin's art-criticism, especially in his *Stones of Venice*, his *Modern Painters* and *Seven Lamps*, and amid much that is novel and suggestive in his theories of government and economics, to which his art-criticism was a bridge, this tone of chastened melancholy at the ugliness and waste in common life recurs with only partial effectiveness. Even less effective is Ruskin's habit of basing his rebukes on the evidence of language; reminding his readers, for example, that 'valuable' means 'strengthening towards life', and that, therefore, the value of a

\* *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, p. 50. (New Universal Library.)



thing is 'independent of opinion and of quantity'\*. No system of thought can be built up on verbal quiddities of this kind, and Ruskin's distinguished services to the gospel of beauty are considerably marred by faults belonging to his individuality. Dickens and Ruskin alike were sentimentalists in a practical age, opposing all the force of their belief in the saving virtues of good-humour and good-taste to the utilitarian principles of self-help and *laissez-faire* which drove rough-shod over the weaker vessels.

The prevailing pessimism which resulted from the triumph of science over faith is more manifest in Matthew Arnold, who hurled his fulminations at the lies which men bore in their right-hand. It drew William Morris away from his practical reconstruction of society to the languorous oblivions of *The Earthly Paradise*:

Not for my words shall ye forget your tears,  
Or hope again for aught that I can say,  
The idle singer of an empty day.

It mollified Thackeray's satire and lent George Eliot her moral fibre, and added the Hamlet-touch of irresoluteness and dubitation to a large portion of mid-Victorian literature. With this we cannot deal in detail. The Christian Socialists of whom Charles Kingsley is best remembered; the new romanticism which is associated with Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti; the fierce desire for beauty which swept across Swinburne like a torrent; the clear spirit of John Henry Newman; the frank impressionism of Walter Pater—these are a few of the names which make

\* ' *Unto This Last* ', p. 83.



the period after 1830, the period of democracy and science acting and re-acting upon letters, one of the fullest and the most vigorous which the history of English literature has known. A weighty name is that of Robert Browning (1812-1889)—a poet wedded to a poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)—whose robust and active mind was always intent to seize the dramatic situation in the comedy of life. Robert Browning is difficult to read, except in his shorter pieces. He possessed more intellect than imagination, and on intellectual grounds he bade his countrymen believe in the seriousness of character and action. His sense of beauty was trained among the art-treasures of Italy, and was, again, intellectual in its approach. His style suffers accordingly, from a certain hard light, without shadows.

We return at this point to Lord Tennyson, the acknowledged voice of his age, and note, first, and most insistently, his word-perfectness. In the mere mastery of language, and in the skill to extract from words the utmost power of expression, whether by sound or by meaning, that is in them, Tennyson stands unrivalled. The illustrations of this gift must be sought at first-hand, and they are probably familiar. The song in *The Princess* which conveys the pleasures of rhyme without a single rhyming verse; the triumph of sense-in-sound in the onomatopœic passage in the *Morte d'Arthur*; the subtle alliterative devices in *Ulysses*, *Tithonus*, and elsewhere; the simple music of his lyrics; all this belongs to that part of Tennyson's work which the world will not willingly let die. Less enduring, maybe, are his

concessions to an antiquated pietism by which he sought to disguise his expressed 'faith in honest doubt'. The cheap sentiment of *The May-Queen* with its conventional conclusion addressed to the tepid enthusiasm of a morbid religiousness would be less offensive in art if it did not correspond in kind to the ineffective teaching of Tennyson's more ambitious poems. *The Idylls of the King*, for example, are so alluring and unforgettable in the exquisite diction of their blank verse that we would gladly overlook the failure to which the modern King Arthur confesses :

I found Him in the shining of the stars,  
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,  
But in His ways with men I find Him not.  
*The Passing of Arthur.*

Even the passing of the May-Queen is more satisfactory than this, for she at least discovers some meaning in her lot, though her interpretation be depressing :

He taught me all the mercy, for He show'd me all the sin.  
Now, tho' my lamp was lighted late, there's One will let  
me in :  
Nor would I now be well, Mother, again if that could be,  
For my desire is but to pass to Him that died for me.

We are discussing the content of literature, not the dogmas of belief, and literary criticism may urge, without disrespect to theology, that, in the age subsequent to Wordsworth and contemporary with Darwin, neither Arthur's melancholy despair, nor the May-Queen's melancholy resignation is an adequate poetic response to the demands of the intellectual imagination. This plane of judgment is, perhaps, too high ; yet

Tennyson invites us to ascend it by the plan and scheme of his *In Memoriam*. There, again and again, he marries modern thought to musical words. The 131 poems out of which, with a prologue and with an epilogue, this tribute to the memory of Arthur Henry Hallam (*d.* 1833) is composed, contain evolutionary ethics and dogmatic theology in a state of solution. The late Professor Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), a Cambridge philosopher, wrote in the reminiscences which he contributed to Hallam Lord Tennyson's *Life* of the poet that Tennyson was 'pre-eminently the poet of science. . . . The physical world is always the world as known to us through physical science: the scientific view of it dominates his thoughts about it. Had it been otherwise, had he met the atheistic tendencies of modern Science with more confident defiance, more confident assertion of an Intuitive Faculty of theological knowledge, overriding the results laboriously reached by empirical science, I think his antagonism to these tendencies would have been less impressive'. This is true, and fairly put, but it does not secure a permanent place for Tennyson as a thinker, bearing in mind the accretion to the inheritance of letters of these results of biological speculation. If Wordsworth, as Professor Sidgwick remarked in the sentence previous to the above, 'left Science unregarded', it was because its particular application to the problem of the origin of species had not been attempted in his day. In the fine phrase of Mr F. W. H. Myers, Wordsworth had 'turned a theology back into a religion', and had made the contemplation of Na-

ture 'a revealing agency'. To this revelation Tennyson succeeded. He attempted to fuse with it the parts of knowledge left 'unregarded' by Wordsworth, and newly uttered by physical science, and what is striking in this passage is the accepted tradition of the opposition between science and faith. Tennyson is praised, and justly praised in his generation, for refraining from a 'confident defiance' of the atheistic tendencies of scientific thought, and for not seeking to 'override' the empirical truths of physics by the intuitive truths of faith, still inadequately figuring as 'theological knowledge'. But a concession is made, as much, one believes, to the splendid genius of Tennyson's presentation as to its actual content, in the sense that 'assurance and doubt must alternate in the moral world', and that 'faith must give the last word', though 'the last word is not the whole truth'.

Obviously, this structure is not permanent. It formed a temporary provision, as secure as the conditions allowed, for the transition, as it seemed, from the theological to the scientific view. But living thought could not acquiesce for more than the period of transition in so diffident a conclusion. A more enduring reconciliation was required between Wordsworth and Darwin, let us say, if names must be given to the antagonists who, by common consent, laid down their gages of difference in the presence of the Orpheus of our times. For who could dispute about conclusions, or survey Parnassus with a foot-rule, when the argument is so musically stated? :

Are God and Nature then at strife,  
That Nature lends such evil dreams ?  
So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life ;

That I, considering everywhere  
Her secret meaning in her deeds,  
And finding that of fifty seeds  
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,  
And falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the great world's altar-stairs  
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope.

*In Memoriam, lv.*

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.

*Crossing the Bar.*

It is as the word-artificer and the magician of speech, as the poet whose spells avail to soothe our common cares and to sanctify our common hopes, that we read and re-read Alfred Tennyson, discovering in his work, perhaps, something more than his own 'faint trust', or, rather, deriving from the faint trust and large hope of so scrupulous a truthseeker as Tennyson enough of firm purpose and fast belief to rally a regiment of waverers.

'History', as Seeley reminds us, 'ought to end with something that might be called a moral. We must not be content with those vague flourishes which the old school of historians used to add for



form's sake before winding up'. We are about to wind-up our study of how to read English literature, and our footsteps have led us to the very margin of our own day. Tennyson died in 1892, and to the generation which watched him dying it seemed that English literature had faded on the moonlight at Haslemere. Here, then, is the 'vague flourish' ready:

For us, the autumn glow, the autumn flame,  
And soon the winter silence shall be ours :  
Him the eternal spring of fadeless fame  
Crowns with no mortal flowers \*.

To the wiser historian, however, whom a study of the past inspires with faith in progress and hope for the future, the need of a moral is insistent. He seeks inevitably to discern the lines which literature will follow in the new time to be. He listens confidently to the voice, faltering, it may be, and insecure, which will lift up for a new generation the burthen of the imaginative faculty, which will fearlessly test by that faculty the increased sum of human experience, and will interpret in its turn the meaning of life on earth.

Full lasting is the song, though he,  
The singer, passes : lasting too,  
For souls not lent in usury,  
The rapture of the forward view.

With that I bear my senses fraught,  
Till what I am fast shoreward drives.  
They are the vessel of the Thought,  
The vessel splits, the Thought survives.

So sings George Meredith in *The Thrush in February*, and his message, like Robert Browning's

\* From Mr William Watson's elegy to Tennyson : *Lachrymae Musarum*, Macmillan, 1893.

*Prospice* or Tennyson's phrase of death, 'his truer name is "Onward"', helps us to formulate the moral with which this history should end. We might pursue the democratic note through its later manifestations, positively in Mr Rudyard Kipling, and, negatively, in Mr William Watson. But these seize the external marks, the unessential symbols of the age, and as far as their verse is attached to the facts and names of new movements instead of to the spirit which these express, their influence is not likely to last. Or we might pursue the technique of the craft in a score of modern writers. But the progress of art is not recorded by steps in technical excellence. Its true progress lies in its successive and successful powers of assimilating, interpreting, and representing the fresh experience of life which the artist gathers in his age, and which is added to the accumulating evidence of God to man. In poetry, Mr Meredith has used these powers. He suffers from the poet's disability that his instrument is the feeble one of language. For the more such experience is novel and the more such evidence is unexpected, the less malleable and serviceable will the instrument prove. This defect remedies itself; it is the pioneer who chiefly suffers, and Mr Meredith's forward imagination is too often disturbed by the necessity of adapting an old language to the requirements of a late philosophy. Thus, he uses makeshift words, vague adjectives for yet-unformed nouns; he re-coins 'Earth' for new currency; he calls in 'God' as trite, as a name with indistinguishable attributes. Certain poems, such as the *Hymn to Colour*, suffer worse than

others from this lack of an adequate instrument to give clear expression to thought. But throughout his work, as poet even more than as novelist, we cannot fail to recognize in George Meredith the line of advance for English literature, and to catch, sometimes in a single verse, sometimes, here and there, in a whole poem, the same note of the inception of new thought which Wordsworth struck in an earlier dawn. Other writers in later years will achieve more perfect expression. To Meredith, alone in this age, has descended the radiant prophecy of the identity of reason with faith. He has attempted, almost before due time, the supreme reconciliation of 'the World' and 'the Mind', of the 'Outer' and the 'Inner', of the *I* and the *not-I*, omitting no evidence, disregarding no branch of knowledge, fearing nothing. So, through him at the last, the fresh material is transfused, and the spirit of English literature, wearing its beautiful art-forms, will proceed, as experience grows, to ever truer manifestations, embodying, as Wordsworth says, 'the impassioned expression which is on the countenance of all science', and availing, in Shelley's phrase, to 'redeem from decay the visitations of the divinity in man'.

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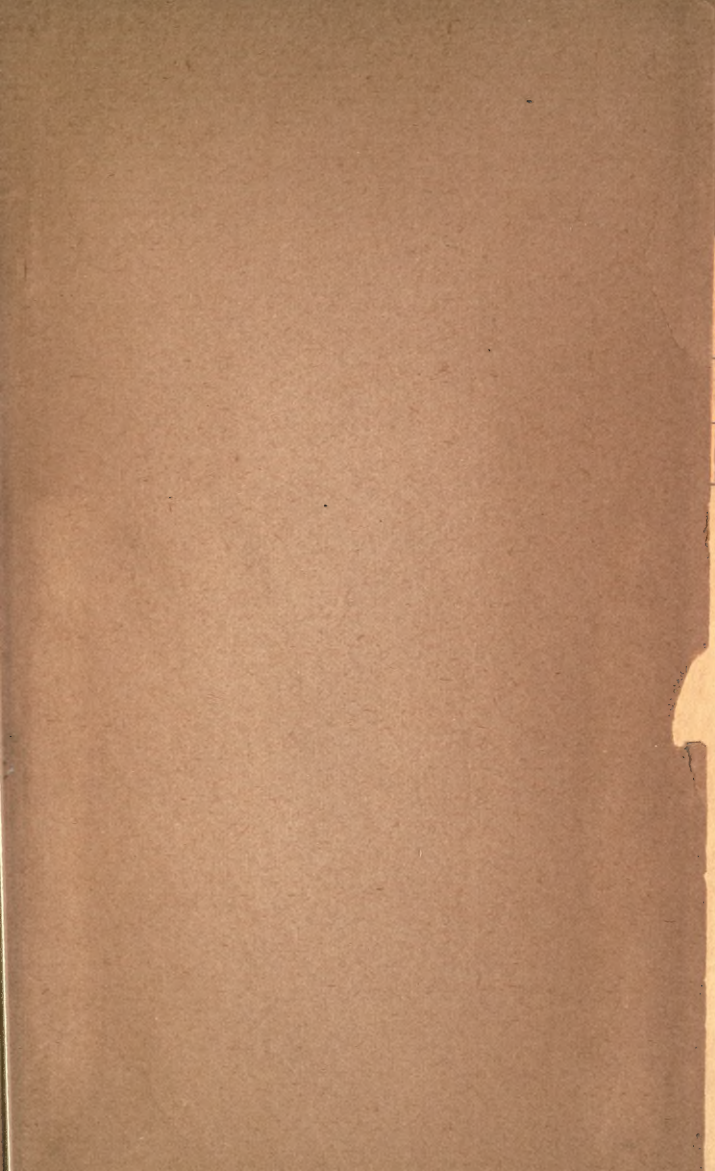
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